

faith in **focus**

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*“He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit,
and he who looks after his master will be honoured.”*

Proverbs 27:18

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Editorial

This month we have much material about other denominations, and our co-operative work with them. It is good, then, to reflect on what a sister-church relationship is, and why we make such distinctions in an age where we are told 'denominationalism' is in its death throes!

So get your 'thinking cap' on and answer this question: How do we determine whether we enter into a sister-church relationship, or not?

This is regarded as a harsh question in an age where we are told by the Christian researchers that 'denominationalism' is dead. It seems that the confessional framework for a church doesn't count anymore. It is far more likely that Christians attend a church/fellowship on the basis of how they 'experience' it. This means quite a degree of pragmatism. It also means much heresy can be proclaimed without a contrary word being said. In fact, to raise anything that could possibly be seen as negative would be to challenge 'The Lord's anointed'.

Anyway, back to the question. Did you tackle it the way you have been instructed in the Reformed faith? Have you consulted your Confessions and seen, in both the Belgic (Article 29) and Westminster (Chapter 25) Confession of Faiths clear words outlining Scripture's teaching for us?

There we read about the "true and false church" and the "more or less pure church" depending upon how faithfully the three marks of the church are administered. Do you remember what those marks (or characteristics) are? There is, firstly, the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word; secondly, the pure administration of the sacraments is maintained; and thirdly, the exercise of church discipline is practiced. A faithful church is where you will find these three.

Where there is one or more of these missing, despite whichever Confessions may be upon the books of a denomination, we have to seriously question them. And if we don't have a sister church relationship with them, for the sake of the Lord, we must stay out of it.

*"The glory of the visible church
is reflected in its members
and consists in their loyalty to Jesus Christ.
That church is glorious
which acknowledges Christ as its Saviour and Head,
and itself manifests His Body."*

R. B. Kuiper

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

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia – Synod 2003

Michael Flinn

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia held their recent synod in the new facilities of the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. This was the first time that I had seen these premises and I was very impressed. The buildings and grounds are spacious – a huge improvement on the Maud Street complex – and a great deal of voluntary work has gone into renovations and improvements so that now the facilities are presentable, pleasant, yet at the same time very functional.

Rev John Haverland and I were warmly welcomed and graciously received. We were given more time than usual to present our fraternal address and we were able to express information when appropriate in the debate. We were also able to attend committee meetings during the synod and give input where it was helpful. The decision to allow fraternal delegates greater input in the proceedings was taken early on in the synod and it is testimony that the CRCA value input from their sister churches. They do not always agree with us in the RCNZ, but our communication has greatly improved and we are very thankful for this.

The two major issues

The two issues that were a major focus of this synod were: 1) the two appeals from Classes New South Wales and Western Australia against the decision three years ago to allow women to be ordained as deacons and to separate the deacons from the ruling session, and 2) the ongoing discussions about the procedures used for profession of faith for younger children. These were areas in which we in the RCNZ have a particular interest and concern. Our Synod 2002 advised the CRCA that our sister-church relationship was again under strain and instructed the fraternal delegates to raise our concerns in these areas and also in the area of worship practices at their Synod 2003 – hence the attention given to these

matters in discussions with CRCA representatives prior to the synod and also in the fraternal address at the synod itself.

The first Tuesday was devoted to an open discussion on the effect of the Synod 2000 decisions on the churches and how these had been applied. It soon became clear that it would be difficult for this synod to reverse what was done in 2000. At least 7 congregations now have women deacons and

that was said! However, the delegates listened to each other respectfully and the discussion was certainly not rushed. The appellants were given ample time to present their case. They argued on Scriptural and confessional grounds that it was wrong to separate the deacons from the session. For example, in 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1:2, Paul links the elders and deacons together. Both form parts of the leadership team. Also,



The RTC entrance (above)

Some views of the grounds of the RTC (below)

in some cases the deacons do not meet separately from the session. Some other congregations have no problem with women as deacons but were waiting until the outcome of Synod 2003, being aware of the appeals against the decision. On the other hand, some congregations are strongly opposed to the decision on Scriptural and confessional grounds.

Given the difference of opinion (and now practice) on this in the CRCA, we were encouraged with the tone of the debate. This is not to say that we agreed with everything

the Belgic Confession, Article 30, states that the council of the Church is formed by elders, deacons and pastors. They also pointed out that passages such as 1 Timothy 3:12 argue against ordaining women as deacons. In addition, they pointed out that the previous study committee on this matter had not been able to reach firm conclusions. The most it could say was that, in the view of the committee, the Scriptures were unclear as to whether or not women could be ordained as deacons. This being the case, in the view of the appellants, the CRCA synod should



have maintained the status quo instead of going ahead with such a significant, and potentially divisive, change. Not all the delegates agreed with these arguments and everyone was given plenty of opportunity to express his views on the matter.

When the appeals were put to the vote, the vote was 14/8 in favour of not sustaining them.

No-one wanted this to be an issue that divides the CRCA, yet there are clear differences of view and it remains to be seen what effect this decision will have. To give you some idea of the degree of struggle, the decision not to sustain the appeals occurred on Friday night. After the weekend break, the synod was reconvened on the Monday and one of the delegates quietly, yet decisively, read out a speech in which he said he could no longer in good conscience retain his seat as a voting delegate because his



The Moderamen of the CRCA (above)

understanding of the Belgic Confession is different from that of the CRCA and a voting seat at a wider assembly requires a public adherence to the confessional standards of the churches. He then withdrew to the gallery. Later, a further decision was taken in relation to this matter. It was decided to establish a committee to further study the confessional issue raised by the CRCA's separation of the diaconate from the session and to bring its findings back to the next synod. It was stated that depending on its findings, this committee may demonstrate the correctness of the traditional interpretation of the relevant articles; demonstrate that the Belgic Confession does not in fact require us to keep the deacons on session; or instigate a process leading to a gravamen [a call for a change to part of a confession] against the relevant articles. In the meantime, while the matter is under study, both practices (deacons on session and deacons meeting apart from session) can be allowed in the CRCA. This decision enabled the delegate to take up his seat again since the synod

was clearly indicating that the confessional issue needed to be further studied and clarified. There are some who are hoping that by means of this study, the CRCA will still be able to revisit earlier decisions in relation to women in the diaconate. However, as fraternal delegates, we would be surprised to see this. The Scriptural argument adduced against ordaining women as deacons did not persuade the majority of Synod 2003. Given this reality, unless additional Scriptural argument can be brought to bear, it seems more likely that Synod 2005 will change the Belgic Confession in keeping with their current understanding and practice. However, we must wait and see.

Children and church membership

We were much more heartened by the discussion on children and church membership. At the last CRCA synod, it was decided that children (possibly as young as 10) could make a profession of faith and then attend the Lord's Supper, although with a slightly different wording than for older members, especially when it came to adherence to the confessions. Younger people could agree publicly with the confessions "in so far as they understood them". The synod had before it a study committee report that reflected on the biblical basis for

professions of faith and the content that these should have. It also examined the pastoral anomalies that can arise when there are two different professions, one for older members and one for younger members.

The report submitted by the committee contained much excellent and very helpful material and this was much appreciated by the synod. However, the conclusions of the report proved to be somewhat controversial. The study committee concluded that it could not find any biblical requirement other than saving faith and a proper understanding of the sacrament in order to qualify for participation in the Lord's Supper. It therefore recommended that the current profession of faith questions *for all prospective communicant members* (emphasis ours), be changed in the CRCA. Notice in particular the wording of the proposed second question:

"Do you acknowledge the Old and New Testament as the infallible word of God, the only true and complete

doctrine of salvation, and the rule for your whole life? Do you promise to devote yourself to its teaching, giving regular and serious attention to the instruction of this church, as summarized in the Apostle's [sic] Creed and our Confessions?"

When it came time to discuss the recommendations, it very soon became clear that the CRCA do not want to move away from the idea of "confessional membership". That is, they *do* want to retain some understanding of the confessions and a public acknowledgement of this in their professing membership. However, no congregation requires an exhaustive or comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the confessions as a condition for public profession of faith. Our knowledge of the Reformed Confessions is something that we grow into the more we study these documents and hear them taught. It was therefore decided to go back to the earlier wording for all professions of faith. But this synod clarified what this meant by affirming: 1) that the second question of the profession of faith form does not [emphasis theirs] require a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the confessions; 2) that the aim of this question is that, through ongoing instruction, we may grow in unity in the truth for which our Lord prayed in John 17:16,23.

The effect of this decision was to return to the status quo for profession of faith procedures in the CRCA. The wording of their form is very similar to our second profession of faith form and it means that membership transfers between the CRCA and the RCNZ can continue as they always have.

Other Decisions of Interest

The synod also decided to establish a committee to give advice concerning the various English translations of Scripture currently available, e.g. the NIV, Today's New International Version (TNIV), the NASB, the NKJV and the English Standard Version. There was concern that the TNIV, which includes gender inclusive language, might eventually supersede or replace the NIV in churches around the world, and that members might not be aware of the dangers of this. It was deemed wise for a committee to provide advice to members as to which translations of the Scriptures were more faithful and accurate for use in personal use and study.

In response to an overture, the synod approved a change to the Apostles' Creed for liturgical use. This altered the phrase, "he descended into hell" to read, "having suffered the torments of hell". This was passed unanimously after having been on the agenda for three consecutive synods.

Interchurch Relations

In relation to the RCNZ, it was decided:

- To concur with the work undertaken in relation to the RCNZ
- To express our deep desire that the tenor of communication will continue to improve.
- To request both Churches (CRCA and RCNZ) to take care in the representation of the decisions and ethos of both Churches so that the most accurate picture be reflected to their churches.
- To send two fraternal delegates to the next synod of the RCNZ.
- To send two CER [Committee for Ecumenical Relations] representatives to NZ for discussions with the RCNZ in the next inter-synodical period.
- To invite the RCNZ to reciprocate with a return visit in the same period.

As fraternal delegates, we were happy with these decisions and thankful for the positive and warm spirit in which they were made. In connection with the ecumenical contacts sustained by the CRCA, it is also of interest for us to note that this synod decided that a Colloquium Doctum must be held for all ministers transferring into the denomination from outside the CRCA. This must be sustained *prior to any call being accepted by a minister*. This brings the CRCA more in line with our own practice. RCNZ ministers wishing to accept a call to a CRCA congregation must now sustain a colloquium doctum, although unlike our churches, this must be done prior to the acceptance of a call rather than after a call has been accepted and the minister and his family relocated.

In the light of a request from the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar the synod mandated the CER to investigate the situation of the Reformed Churches in Myanmar and to advise the next synod of any action to be taken. We mentioned that Rev John Goris and Rev Bruce Hoyt have both been to Myanmar and that we may be able to co-operate together in this work.

Some of the NSW churches have significant contact with Korean Christians. Again the CER was asked to investigate the situation of the Korean churches in Australia and to advise the next synod of any actions to be taken.

Fraternal greetings were brought in person from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Christian Reformed Church of North America as well as from three South African Reformed Churches - the GKSA (Reformed Church of SA), the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) and the NHK (Nederduitsch Hervormede Kerk, SA). In

listening to these greetings the synod heard Australian, Irish, Scottish and Afrikaaner accents! Of course, they also heard the Queen's English from the fraternal delegates from New Zealand!

Synod decided to send a delegate to the next synods of the Javanese Christian Reformed Church (GKJ), the DRC, GKSA, and the Christian Reformed Church of North America. While the synod sought to extend their ecumenical relationships in a number of areas they also decided to cease their correspondence relationship with the Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands (previously known as the GKN).

The CRCA continue to be closely involved in the Reformed Ecumenical Council that has 38 member denominations in 24 countries.

It was also noted that many immigrants from South Africa have settled into Australia. There was a general discussion on the difficulty of making contact with many of the South African immigrants as well as ways and means of assisting them to settle into the CRCA. The churches were urged to do whatever they could to improve their contact with Afrikaner immigrants and the CER was asked to advise the churches on the best ways to minister to those coming from South Africa. We noted with interest that there are now at least 5 ministers who have been called from South African churches now serving in the CRCA.

Overseas Diaconal Work and Mission

The CRCA continue to support the work of World Development and Relief Workgroup, which corresponds to the work of our National Diaconate Committee. Rev. Bert Kuipers has been especially involved in this during the intersynodical period and the CRCA are especially grateful for his work and for the way in which his session and congregation has made this possible. In this connection, the synod decided to appoint a part-time worker to promote the work of world relief by visiting the main international projects, speaking at as many local churches as possible and encouraging deacons in this work.

Rev. Kevin Reitveld gave a presentation on the mission work he and his wife have established in the Solomon Islands together with Frank and Janet de Hoog. This project received the full endorsement of the synod and the churches were encouraged to continue to support this ministry through their prayers, gifts and regular SWIM teams.

Training for the Ministry

This synod noted with some concern that there are fewer CRCA students in training for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Also, some are receiving training from other institutions, including Moore College. Synod agreed on procedures involving the classes, the RTC faculty and the RTC deputies to guide the process of entry into the ministry by men who have gained their ministerial training at other institutions. Support for the RTC, however, remains strong and the synod decided to urge local pastors and sessions to identify and encourage suitably gifted men to consider prayerfully God's call to the ordained ministry and to training at the RTC. It also instructed the deputies to develop a clearly defined and detailed minimum level of academic standard for entry into the ordained



ministry of the CRCA and report to their next synod.

Conclusion

As fraternal delegates, we were grateful for the way we were received and for the way in which the concerns of our churches were graciously heard by the CRCA synod. We were encouraged by many of the decisions, but remain concerned, in particular, about the decision not to sustain the appeals in relation to women in the diaconate. No doubt this will come up for discussion again at our Synod 2005. In the meantime, let's continue to pray for our sister churches in Australia, as they digest, and work with, the decisions of Synod 2003.

(The Rev. Dr. M. Flinn serves as a member of our Synodical Interchurch relations Committee. He is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, in Christchurch)

Speech to CRCA Synod 2003

Rev. Dr. Michael Flinn

Mr. Chairman
Members of the Moderamen
Fellow delegates, and visitors to the synod:

I want to begin by expressing thanks to your Synodical Interim Committee and the members of the Moderamen for allowing us the opportunity to speak a little more extensively than usual. It is difficult to confine an address of this nature to 10 minutes. We appreciate the opportunity to address you more fully at this synod and we hope that this will be mutually beneficial.

I bring greetings on behalf our churches in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been praying for this synod, that its decisions would be in accordance with God's revealed Word and contribute to the extension of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the country affectionately known as the island west of New Zealand.

Let me begin by telling you something of what lives in our churches across the Tasman. Our current membership stands at just over 3300 in 19 congregations. Since your last synod, we have been blessed by the institution of two new congregations, one in Hamilton and one in Christchurch. These churches were established as a result of congregations growing large (by our standards) and wanting to reach out in other parts of these cities. Both mother and daughter churches continue to receive blessing. I can speak personally about that because I am privileged to serve in one of those new congregations in Christchurch. In addition, one of our ministers is serving in a home mission work in Wanganui. The congregation there is small but very keen and enthusiastic. Then too in the Wellington area, we have a minister who has recently come from South Africa, and who is serving as a home missionary with a special focus on the many South African immigrants that we have in New Zealand. This is something new and exciting for us and we are seeking the Lord's blessing also in this area of outreach.

In regard to overseas mission, our churches continue to support Miss Janice Reid in her work in radio broadcasting with the Far East Broadcasting Company. Beyond that, we have been especially encouraged by missionary opportunities that are opening up to us through the International Conference of Reformed Churches. We have been able to send pastors and a Christian school teacher to Uganda on short term mission work in association with the OPC in the US. More recently, one of our pastors has visited

Myanmar and we are exploring the possibility of further short term mission work in the teaching and training of pastors and elders in the developing Reformed Churches there. Closer to home, our Overseas Mission Board has been investigating the possibility of sending a full-time pastor to PNG. We are in contact with a missionary of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Rev. Stephen 'tHart, who has been serving there for seven years and there is need for a colleague to help share the growing opportunities to see churches further established and new congregations planted. Our churches are committed to exploring this further and Lord willing, we will be able to place a missionary family in PNG within the next few years.

When we left the REC and entered the ICRC, it was one of our strong desires that there would be opportunities for us to cooperate in mission with like-minded churches and we are thankful that these are beginning to eventuate.

On the interchurch relations front, we have entered a full sister church relationship with the GKN (Liberated) in the Netherlands and, closer to home, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. We are still continuing contact with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We have made some progress in discussion with them, but so far a sister church relationship has not been achieved.

We continue to enjoy cooperation with you in relation to the training of our ministers. We share the work of the RTC and are thankful for it. As you know, there have been some problems that have arisen because of the particular position held by two of the lecturers in relation to Word and Spirit. In the judgment of recent synods, this position is contrary to the Westminster Confession, chapter 1. Because of this, Synod 2002 gave notice of the dissolution of the contract between our churches and the Board of the RTC, to take effect at Synod 2005, and instructed the deputies to draw up an agreement, in consultation with the College, that allows for a working relationship between the RCNZ and the RTC. Please understand that there is nothing personal in this, and we very much appreciate the instruction given by those and the other lecturers at the College. However, it is a problem that needs to be addressed, and Lord willing, a solution will be found. Our deputies are currently working on this and it is expected that they will make a recommendation to the sessions either this year or next to allow for responses prior to synod 2005.

So then, what of the relationship between our churches and why have we experienced some tension in recent years? Brothers, be assured that we value our relationship and wish it to continue. However, we have to speak about matters that concern us. Please

do not take this negatively. It is not our desire to be reactionary or to be "policemen" from across the Tasman. In our rules for sister church relationships, it is stated that we should:

Warn each other in respect of spiritual dangers that arise and spread and imperil the Church of Christ.

And:

Correct each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness whether by commission or omission on the score of profession and/or practice of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

It has come to our attention that in your own rules for CEF, you do not have similar wording. You may not think it your place to correct us in love, if you thought that we were departing from orthodoxy or orthopraxy. However, we would not resent it if you had something to say to us. We believe that in this relationship, brothers should be able to speak to each other openly and honestly. Much better to do that in love with the goal of trying to resolve matters than to draw further away and say nothing at all.

Three points

Synod 2002 instructed us to raise with you three points in particular. Let me address them in turn.

First, there is your decision of last synod to allow for the ordination of women as deacons. We have noted the concurrent decision to remove deacons from the session so that it can be seen that they are clearly not serving in a ruling office in the church. However, from our point of view, we were concerned that the study committee report that led you to this decision appeared not to deal adequately with what it means to be ordained into office in the church, and the relationship between the offices of pastor, elder and deacon, and the three-fold offices of Christ. From our point of view there was not sufficient Scriptural evidence for you to take the decision that you did. And the historical evidence cited is inconclusive in our view. Your decision is a departure from long established practice in Reformed churches. It excludes the practice of deacons serving on Session, alongside the elders in smaller congregations. Our own Church Order states that "according to local regulations, the deacons may meet with the session and shall invariably do so whenever the total number of elders is less than three." According to P.Y. De Jong, in his commentary on the Belgic Confession, the practice of having deacons meet with elders was permitted very early on in the history of Reformed Churches, especially when congregations were smaller. Furthermore, in our churches, deacons may also be delegated to represent their congregations at a presbytery meeting or a synod on

occasion, and of course, they must, together with the ruling elders, sign the Form of Subscription, which binds them to teach diligently and defend faithfully the doctrine taught in our Confessions. Under this Form, all office-bearers are to reject errors that militate against this doctrine and declare themselves disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert themselves in keeping the church free from such errors. How could this be if deacons, within their sphere of service, and alongside the elders, do not also have a role of authoritatively managing God's household under the leadership and authority of the Chief Shepherd?

Of course, Church Orders, Confessions, let alone traditional practice, while important, are not infallible. The Reformation principle is that Scripture alone is God's revealed Word. Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 3:12 that deacons must be the husband of one wife and that they must manage their own children and household well. So we ask with respect: Does this apply to male deacons only? If so, where are female deacons mentioned in 1 Timothy 3? Your own study committee report concludes that "the women" of verse 11 are more likely to be the wives of deacons or women serving alongside deacons in some form of diaconal ministry rather than women ordained into the office of deacon. We agree. If Paul had expected Timothy to ordain females as deacons in the church, would he not have made this very clear in a passage where he is instructing him on how to conduct himself in the household of God?

Our committee has studied the appeals against this decision, in particular the appeal from Classis New South Wales, and we do not hesitate to commend this appeal to you. In our view, it is well-structured and well-worded and we believe that our churches would endorse it.

Church and church membership

The second area that we need to speak about is your decision of last synod on Children and Church Membership. Be assured: We are aware that you are not discussing children partaking at the Lord's Supper without any form of profession. However, your last synod did decide to introduce a modified procedure for the profession of faith of younger members. We have taken note of the current report and recommendations before this synod. We can see a definite advantage in the recommendations in that they remove the anomaly of having two different professions, one for older members and one for younger members. However, if the recommendations are adopted, we wonder how doctrinal discipline would be applied in the CRCA. Our own wording in the profession of faith form is "if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life" [will you] "submit to [the church's] admonition and

discipline". While falling short of the Form of Subscription for office-bearers, this wording does imply a certain level of understanding and sanctification in a person's life. This is determined, in part, by an interview with the elders prior to the profession of faith and the person must indicate a willingness to receive the ministry of the elders and submit to the church's discipline if he or she becomes delinquent. We wonder about how home visitation and the discipline of the church would be carried out in respect of boys and girls as young as 10. Surely at this stage of a person's life, spiritual oversight should be the responsibility of the parents rather than the direct responsibility of the elders of the congregation. We also respectfully question the wisdom of permitting professing members as young as 10 to vote in the church, as the recommendations suggest. Would they possess the discernment and understanding to vote for office-bearers and share in decisions involving such matters as the purchase of property or the calling of ministers?

There may well also be pastoral difficulties if such young members transfer with their families to other congregations in which the normal pattern is for people to profess their faith when they are older.

And these difficulties may be compounded should families come to New Zealand and enter our churches. Should they then be required to do another profession of faith, with the wording of our form? This would seem inconsistent with the nature of the sister church relationship. Yet our sessions may have some difficulty in accepting the communicant membership of people who have not indicated publicly an adherence to the articles of the Christian faith and the doctrine taught in our churches as the true and complete doctrine of salvation.

We hope that you will take these considerations into account when debating the study committee report and its recommendations.

Worship

The third area we have been asked to speak of is the matter of worship. In our discussions with members of the SIC, we have acknowledged that this is a difficult topic to "get a handle on" because much of the information we receive is anecdotal and not necessarily reflective of the position of the CRCA as a whole. However, it is something

we need to speak about because it can affect the transference of membership. Sometimes our members move to Australia and do not "feel at home" in some of your worship services and this may be the case with some of your members coming to New Zealand.

It might be helpful for you if here also we explain something of what lives in our churches. First, let me state for the record that in our worship services there is some measure of diversity among us in the RCNZ. By God's grace, our congregations are unified in worship, but are not uniform. There are differences in the use of instruments to accompany the singing and whether or not the children have Sunday School before the service or during it. Some ministers may give a children's talk during the service; others may prepare notes for the children to fill out during the sermon. There are differences. But as churches we wish to keep in step with one



another and not become so different that members feel at home in the public worship of one congregation but not in another.

One area in which this unity comes to particular expression is the singing. Our Church Order requires that in our worship services, only the 150 psalms and the collection of hymns for church use, approved and adopted by Synod may be sung. It also states that the singing of psalms in divine worship is a requirement, but the use of the approved hymns is left to the freedom of the churches.

In the past few years, the material at least provisionally approved by the synod for use in worship services has expanded. This is because we have been trying to find a replacement for the old blue CRC Psalter Hymnal, which we have used for many years, but which is now out of print. However, we are still working with the principle that we should agree together on the body of hymn material that we use for public worship services. And we also agree that the singing of the psalms in worship is a requirement. None of our congregations sings psalms exclusively, but we would describe ourselves

as preponderant psalmists. We believe that it is important to sing from the material inspired by the Holy Spirit and composed as the covenant worship songs of God's people and we believe that much of the modern material that is produced in the evangelical world is shallow and narrow in focus by comparison and contrast with the psalms. Our churches are now working on a new psalter hymnal. You may smile at this given your own experience of doing this in the past, but we believe it is important to maintain that measure of similarity between the congregations in this important aspect of worship.

Our churches are also committed to what is called the "regulative principle" in public worship as it is expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35 and in the Westminster Confession, chapter 21. We believe that we may not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his Word. It is not for us to devise new ways of worshipping God that please us but which do not please him. The second commandment requires that we humble ourselves and submit to what God commands. It is for this reason that we do

not wish to change our worship services along the lines of the Willow Creek "seeker service" model. We believe that public worship is an interaction between God and his people along covenantal lines. It is God who must remain the focus of our attention as a worshipping people, not the person who is interested or seeking. We want to be hospitable and caring for visitors in our midst, but we do not want to abandon divinely prescribed worship practices simply because an unbelieving visitor finds it difficult to understand and appreciate them at first.

We are also committed to the principle of proclaiming the whole counsel of God and as an expression of this, in our evening worship services, the Word is expounded as summarized in the Confessional Standards. The Heidelberg Catechism is most frequently used for this purpose, but not exclusively. We also preach the Scriptures using as the framework of the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession.

Are we more prescriptive than you in worship? Not necessarily. We have not adopted an order of service as you have. But we have agreed to use the prescribed forms

for baptism, professions of faith, and the Lord's Supper and we do have Articles 57 and 66 of the Church Order that cover the exposition of our confessional standards and the matter of psalms and hymns.

It grieves us when some of our members go to Australia and find it hard to feel at home in some of your congregations. To us, and no doubt also to you, this seems inconsistent with the sister church relationship that we enjoy. We do not expect that we should be carbon copies of one another in the area of worship any more than we have strict uniformity among our member congregations. But we will remain concerned if we drift further apart as sister churches and our prayer is that we would come closer together in years to come – also in this area which is so close to all our hearts.

Conclusion

Thank you for listening to us. We appreciate the extra time we have been given and take this as an indication also on your part that you desire our relationship to improve. May the Lord bless your ongoing deliberations and may they be for the furtherance of His kingdom in Australia and further afield.

The GKSA Synod

Report of the 2003 Synod

John Rogers

The Rev. Bill Wiersma had been nominated by our last Synod to represent our Churches at the Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa, which was held from Monday, January 6th to Thursday, January 16th. However, because of congregational commitments, Bill was unable to go and the Interchurch Relations Committee sent me in his place which, of course, I was very glad to do. Once again it was a very enjoyable experience, during which I also preached twice and after the Synod was able to take five days leave for which a friend took me to Durban, combining his business with my pleasure! Once again also, I was able to keep well up with the debate through the simultaneous translation service. I shall report on the Synod under the following headings.

A. MISSION and EVANGELISM

The RCSA cooperates with the Bible Society supporting it to the tune of R900,000 pa. In a population of 42 million, 12 million are illiterate. Therefore the

Bible Society is putting the Bible on Cassette.

Rev. Jan Wessels spoke on behalf of the Reformed Churches of Botswana. Botswana is a large country, sparsely populated and greatly afflicted by HIV/AIDS outside and inside the Church, including Church leaders. There is terrible poverty in Botswana, with 80% of church members being illiterate. The RCSA has opportunities for men to be called to serve in Botswana and Zambia at the present time. There is also a great need in Rwanda.

The RCSA has also cooperated with Netherlands Reformed Churches (Netherlands) people who have worked mainly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal for many years.

Rev. Eric Kayayan spoke of his continuing radio ministry to Francophone Africa, and his desire to expand it elsewhere. He has recently been in touch with the FEBC with a view to supplying broadcasts for French-speaking Pacific and Asian regions. The RCSA have a number of other missionaries but their missionary work is not centrally coordinated as ours is through our OMB, so it is hard to get a handle on all that is done by the denomination.

B. CHURCH GOVERNMENT and OFFICE

Women in Ecclesiastical Office

The Synod of 1988 decided against women in ecclesiastical office. However, there have been protests against that decision ever since. In 2000 Synod re-affirmed that decision and appointed a new study committee to study the question positively: what is woman's special task in church life? It was rather surprising, therefore, to hear this committee bring recommendations to open the offices to women. There were also appeals on the matter. Two of the prime movers on this matter are NT Prof. Fika van Rensburg & Rev. Wim Vergeer, who want all offices open to women.

I was disappointed with some of the reasoning on this subject, which perhaps can be summarised as follows. I was concerned with the approach to exegesis. The proponents of women in office believed that in the past Synod was transferring principles of headship that Scripture lays down between a husband and wife and makes them refer to women in general. Furthermore, they said, Synod was guilty of reading the Bible in a

historic way, not looking at it in a socio-historic way. They claimed that "Gen. 1-3 does not speak of authority but of the society in which man originated. The society in which we live has changed in such a way that women are speaking in public and standing in leadership positions and if they are married I don't think they ever question their husband's headship. But when they are prohibited from doing anything in the Church, that breaks peace and causes problems."

The other respect in which I was disappointed in these brothers' approach was what I might call an individual/subjective line of thinking. It was claimed that the matter was on the floor of synod because of the pain and trauma of female theological students. "Should I tell them they cannot do anything and may not give heed to the calling they feel or should I tell them the restrictions our denomination places on them and that they should be patient. I cannot do this. It is impossible for me to tell them their calling to eldership is wrong."

Of course, there was stiff opposition to this and the upshot was ten decisions, the most important of which were the following:

- 1 We should use all the gifts of women in the Church to relieve the feeling of inferiority/treatment as inferior some women have. This concerns the calling of believers in general.
- 2 Reaffirmation of male headship in home & Church.
- 3 Scripture indicates there were women deacons & therefore women who have the necessary gifts can be ordained as deacons in the GKSA.
- 4 Women had prophetic gifts in the NT but it is not clear how they were used, nor today either. Synod appointed further deputies to study this matter.
- 5 That committee is also to study the Church Order consequences for this decision.
- 6 The Committee is to study how the relationship between husband and wife applies to other aspects of Church life.

From my observation, the decision to open the office of deacon to women was passed by between 55% to 60% of delegates. That is a pity and we need to pray that the RCSA may be given much wisdom as there are several other aspects of this whole question that are to be studied and will be back on the table in three years time, Lord willing. I felt I had to express what I believe would be our Churches' concern over some of these decisions, which I hope I did graciously.

C. INTEGRATION of the three NATIONAL SYNODS

The RCSA consists of three National synods, Soutpansberg (Venda people in the north), Middelande (mixed but mainly Zulu) and the

Afrikaner national synod. Relationships between them are still difficult. The Middelande Synod has not sat for a good number of years and so it is hard even to get together with them properly to work things out. And for even longer there has not been a General Synod (of the three: Afrikaner National, Soutpansberg and Middelande synods). As a result of this continuing tension between the three, Soutpansberg has withdrawn their students from the Theological School and begun their own. Well, necessity is the mother of invention and with the decision to allow women into the office of

swearing in general. They urged the whole gamut of the public press media, entertainment industry, authors, etc, to avoid it; also undignified and racist swear words.

E. ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The RCSA are very active in ecumenical relations. They are working to make contact with churches in Hungary, the UK and Spain and with South African youth in London. Like ourselves, the RCSA are talking to the United Reformed Church of North America with a view to a sister-Church relationship. The URCNA sent the Rev. Ray Sikkema as an



Rev John Rogers by the "Die Gelofte" monument

deacon, they have decided to call for a General Synod because that requires a change to the Church Order and changes can only be made to the Church Order in a General Synod.

D. CHURCH and SOCIETY

Synod was concerned that Reformed Christians and other Christians also witness to the government in a positive way seeking to have an influence on government policy. They see a need to promote to all Christians a view of life that is applicable to all of life.

Partly in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Synod released a statement to the press affirming that marriage is heterosexual and monogamous, and that all other forms of sexual practice are sin. Homosexual practice is sin and those involved in it should be pastored seeking to bring them to conversion in the hope that by the grace of God they may live God-honouring lives according to a biblical sexuality.

Synod also made another press statement expressing concern about the growth of public and private blasphemy and

observer. He only confirmed in my mind that we really ought to be forging that relationship by our next Synod. The RCSA are still talking to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). The last Liberated Synod in May 2002 intended to offer a sister Church relationship to the RCSA but it was stymied by objections brought by the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. The Liberated people in Holland were very frustrated by this, as they had requested input from their South African sister Church well in advance but had received no response. Hopefully it will be resolved by next Synod.

The RCSA are also continuing to talk to the CRCNA who suspended sister Church ties back in the apartheid days. Prof. Dries du Plooy reported on his visit in 2000: "When you speak about certain texts with people within the CRC you really feel a unity. At other times when you attend services and talk to other people you don't feel unity because of liturgical matters and church polity matters." He further said it is hard to evaluate the CRC because there are different modalities in it. They will continue to talk to the CRCNA in

the inter-synodical period.

By the by, in reply to my greetings, Henk Stoker said that since Revs Dries Beukes and Willie Botha (of the two larger Dutch Reformed Churches) came back from our Synod, they now call the RCNZ the 'Kiwi Doppers,' the colloquial term for the RCSA.

F. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION and PUBLICATIONS

Synod charged the deputies for Christian education and Catechism to plan and discuss the possibilities of biblical education outside public schools (after-school programmes open to everybody).



Rev John Rogers sets his sights on the GKSA Synod

In 2000 the Synod mandated a committee to provide guidance of principles and practice for Christian education in the South African context in the light of the growing secularisation and multi-religious approach of South African society and its education system. The deputies established a web page to promote Christian education among sessions, parents and teachers; and to promote the initiatives already taken towards independent Christian schools. There are a number of organisations involved that specialise in Christian education as far as the curriculum in state schools is concerned. No religion whatsoever is allowed to be taught in the schools anymore.

This Synod therefore urged sessions to instruct parents in the need for Christian education. Parents are urged, so far as local state schools are concerned, to ensure that the whole curriculum is Christ-centred and, where possible, to establish & uphold Reformed schools. Parents are called according to their baptismal vows to promote education according to their confession. "In

line with Dort 1618-1619," said one speaker, "we believe that Church, home and school must speak with one mind." The new deputies for Christian education are to evaluate new education legislation and policy documents from a Christian perspective. Synod stressed the importance of parents' responsibility in this regard.

Concern was expressed about the government curriculum which promotes all religions and sexual orientations as equal; and also about the growing influence of evolution among Reformed people. There was discussion re liaising with the government and cooperating with the other

Afrikaans churches to this end.

In this connection, Synod released another statement to the Press, this time on Evolution (this may not be not word for word but it is close):

"The GKSA is concerned that in 2004 evolution will be part of the education curriculum and will be the only theory of origins permitted to be taught. This does not take into account the revelation of salvation history which posits an original creation and all very good, a fall into sin, and salvation and renewal in Christ. It is against our Christian faith and even against the constitution of the country which guarantees freedom of religion. In accordance with this, Synod urges parents to equip their children in accordance with the biblical doctrine of creation and against Darwinian evolutionism. Synod urges Christian teachers to equip children in all schools with a biblical doctrine of creation."

Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education

Since its inception, PU has always been regarded as the Doppers' university (49% of all present RCSA tertiary students study at PU although they represent only 7% of the total student body of around 10,000). However, last year PU gave Archbishop Desmond Tutu an honorary doctorate. There was a great deal of unhappiness about this, a number feeling that the RCSA should protest against it. In response to this, the rector, Dr Ehlof replied, "Our view was: here is someone who in our opinion as a Christian has contributed so much to South Africa in the last 15 years and especially in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We know he made many controversial comments but he is a Christian, even though not a Reformed Christian. We didn't try to send a message to the government by our action because Tutu is seriously critical of the government. We did not give him an honorary D.Th. but a D.Phil." There was actually what they call a Petition of Protest against this in which it was stated: "the rector says he is a true Christian but the Petition gave evidence he was not. He speaks of, eg, all God's Hindu people, etc."

Many feel quite disillusioned about all this, especially as the government has a policy to amalgamate certain educational institutions to change the character of their recent past. For example, it wants to amalgamate PU with Sebokeng and North West University, completely secular state institutions. This will obviously change the Christian character of Potch, many believe. Indeed, many believe it is their intention! Synod encouraged the university council to maintain the Christian character of the university, and to promote the Christian world and life view not only in every aspect of the curriculum but also in every area of life.

G. THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION and DOCTRINAL MATTERS

Apostles' Creed

Again the clause "descended into hell" was discussed. In the course of the discussion they asked all the overseas delegates for their input and how the matter stood in their churches. Eventually they adopted the wording "wat die angste van die hel in tot die dood toe ondergaan het;" which, literally translated, means: "who the agonies of hell unto death underwent."

Lord's Day/Sabbath

In 2000 some churches asked for guidance on how to advise people re keeping the Lord's Day in the face of an increasingly secularised society. The study committee reported back that there is a clear relationship between the OT Sabbath and the

NT Sunday on the grounds of the 4th commandment, and it was to be seen as a covenant sign. All the NT purposes of Sunday (cf. the Heidelberg; "to learn what God's Word teaches, participate in the sacraments, pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.") are also to be seen in the OT Sabbath. However, Christ has liberated the Lord's Day of all legalism (was the OT Sabbath really legalistic?) and ceremonial aspects.

There was a caution to this that we be careful we don't make the OT sound as if it were external in itself (which I was glad to hear). The emphasis of the Heidelberg is on equipping believers and it requires the believer to convene with the congregation for the above-mentioned religious activities. This refers to the Christian day of celebration, namely, Sunday. The 2nd pt of the Catechism relates rest to every day of the believer's life as the beginning of the eternal Sabbath. We should appreciate the emphasis on the covenant character of Sabbath/Sunday rest. There should be an active passivity and a passive activity. The catechism has no reference to the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. It should be a day of rest, devotion and commemoration, blessing and equipment, also for daily work during the week, all of which were also present in the OT Sabbath.

The heart of the report was practical guidelines for obedience to the 4th commandment. Some objected to these guidelines as casuistical. Others objected to that concern. The commandment linked up with a certain rhythm, they said. Even all modern exercise programmes allow for a day of rest. One professor questioned whether guidelines are the work of synod. In practice, it will be used as a recipe book and make the office of elder redundant. Eventually another delegate suggested "guidelines" be replaced with "perspectives." (Oh dear, that PC, meaningless word!) So carried. I could not help but think: do we really ask study committees to work for hours just so we may share perspectives? Another little lesson, I thought, to think well before you take something to Synod and for Synods to think well before they take things on board. For all the concerns about casuistry could have been expressed in 2000 and those brothers saved the needless work. Oh well, so it is not only the RCNZ that make those sorts of mistakes!

H. LITURGY and WORSHIP

Forms and Confessions

There was an overture to retranslate all Liturgical Forms from the original languages into modern Afrikaans, particularly because most people only listen to the Forms and do not read them. Another overture wanted

another LS Form that emphasises the ascended Lord and the reality of communion with the risen Christ; that has more of a spirit of celebration, praise, gratitude and joy. The emphasis should not be on ethics or education but to rejoice in the Lord's salvation and deliverance. One questioned whether we put too much emphasis on what members experience rather than on what we are actually doing.

Scripture and Hymnody

There were further appeals against the 1983 Afrikaans translation of the Scriptures for use in public worship. Many are concerned that the 1983 translation does not give due place to Christ in the Psalms, etc, by capitalising names of Christ, eg, "Unto us a Son is born, unto us a Child is given," as was done in the old Afrikaans translation of 1953 and in many other language translations. The Synod generally believed that this was not a valid criticism but rather, it demonstrated a lack of appreciation for the history of salvation and the fact that many Messianic prophecies had a primary and immediate application and fulfilment as did, e.g., Is.9:6 (mentioned above). In response to this and instead of just declining the appeals against the 1983 translation, the Synod adopted quite a long statement on its understanding of the Messianic nature of Scripture and the development of salvation history and hermeneutics which, as I listened to it, sounded very good and received almost unanimous approval. They are hopeful they will not have to deal with this issue again.

The same concerns were expressed, but more strongly, over the new versification of the Psalms for singing. This translation was finished in 2001 and has been adopted by the two larger Dutch Reformed Churches already. There was a long debate over this. Some asserted that the versifier, a Dutch Reformed man, Professor (of Afrikaans at Potch) T.T. Cloete, is on public record as saying he doesn't believe the Psalms are Messianic but that the Messianic reference has been read into the Psalms by the early Church and since. Others believed that was a misunderstanding and misconstruction of Cloete and that his real position is that the Psalms were not immediately, when written, Messianic or were not seen as Messianic. Those whom I talked to who were happy to accept both the 1983 New Afrikaans Translation of the Bible & Cloete's Psalm versifications believed that a lot of the concern of the others was historically based. The RCSA was born out of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1859 after the Dutch Reformed Church required people, under threat of discipline, to sing hymns, many of them being nineteenth century Methodist-type hymns or some of the Scottish hymns from the same era of a revivalistic,

subjectivistic stripe, which are not even sung now by the Dutch Reformed Church. But those who do accept the new book, and hymns (versus Psalms only), believe that those who don't are not distinguishing between those hymns and hymns per se and that they are reacting out of a fear of the Church going back on its history and *raison d'être*. Of course, the concerned brothers deny this and believe their concerns are principal.

At any rate, Synod decided not to attempt to update the language of the old *Totius versifications*, but to accept the Cloete versifications and publish both the 1936 and 2001 versifications together in the same book each session using them as it sees fit while a committee studies the faithfulness of the Messianic passages with a view to clarify any lacks in the versifications with footnotes. The new versification makes no distinction between the three names of God in the Psalms. According to one man Psalm 1 omits mention of the Law of God, which the Psalm mentions twice. It appears as if they may be more of a paraphrase than a careful versification with many of the Messianic references omitted, eg, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit Thou at my right hand" in Ps.110.

Synod also agreed to accept hymns that are faithful to Scriptural truth (the RCSA had been traditionally a Psalms-only Church).

Again, I must thank the Churches for giving me the privilege of representing them in South Africa. Synods are hard work, and writing up reports such as these are too. Nevertheless it is still a privilege and pleasure to meet and experience the fellowship of other Reformed believers in quite a different part of the world amid circumstances which in some ways are quite different from ours yet in others, we are not so different at all. While there I also met with brothers from the other two Dutch Reformed Churches and also the Afrikaans Protestant Church (another reformed Church formed out of the large Dutch Reformed Church in 1987). Let us continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in South Africa that the Lord may bless and use them in building up his kingdom in that part of the world.

(The Rev. J. Rogers is the minister of the Reformed Church of the North Shore, Auckland)

THANK YOU!

Gerry & Anne van Dalen are most appreciative of all the prayers, cards, and concern expressed for Gerry following his recent time in hospital. The fellowship of the saints has been a precious thing to us. *Stratford, Taranaki*

A feminine focus

The spiritual discipline of – Bible intake

Sally Davey

(The second in a series of articles reviewing and applying Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, by Donald J. Whitney.)

We all know we need to read the Bible. From our earliest years, if we grew up in the church, our parents, Sunday School teachers and pastors have told us – and hopefully shown us by their example – how to make bible reading a daily part of the Christian life. In many ways, bible reading is one of the easiest of the spiritual disciplines to practise. All we need is to find a quiet spot, open our bible, and focus our minds on the content. Well, of course there's more to it than this – but it generally requires less energy of self-denial and self-discipline than some of the other spiritual disciplines. But on the other hand, it's not enough to have a verse propped up on the kitchen windowsill, or to hear a few verses read out loud after a meal (useful as those practices are). Careful thought and reflection are also needed if the Word is going to have any impact on our hearts and lives.

Donald Whitney uses an interesting expression to explain what he means by the spiritual discipline of studying the Bible to know it well. He calls it "bible intake." I like it: at first it sounded a bit corny, like comparing studying the Word of God to some kind of mechanical digestion process. But of course the idea of the Scriptures as food is a thoroughly biblical one; and the analogy of eating, digestion and growing in spiritual strength and stature through their consumption is entirely appropriate.

It is work

But sadly, so many of us don't consume it – or not enough – and as a result we are still spiritual babies. Why, Whitney asks, do so many Christians neglect God's Word? R.C. Sproul has given us the answer, painfully well. He says: "Here then, is the real problem of our negligence. We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a

lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy." This reminds me of one of the Proverbs: "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!" (19:24) When we have our bibles at our hands (in abundance) but are too lazy to spend the time and energy taking its truths into our hearts, then we are just this kind of sluggard. And the result, of course, is spiritual immaturity.

As Whitney reminds us, there are many ways to take in God's Word. We need to make use of all of them. The most obvious is to hear it – and the best way to hear it is to hear it preached: proclaimed, explained, applied to our hearts in a live-it-out-in-today's world here-and-now kind of way. But this is an active, not a passive experience. We should prepare ourselves for the hearing of preaching – the night before, preferably. Preparation continues as we walk into church. Whitney comments:

"If you enter the typical evangelical church two minutes before the start of the worship service, it sounds almost like you've walked into a gymnasium two minutes before a basketball game. Part of my pastoral heart appreciates the good things represented by people who are glad to see and talk with each other. There is a spirit of family reunion in the air when the family of God gather together. But I think a larger part of my heart longs for reverence and a spirit of seeking God among those who come to hear His Word." And then he goes on to recall a congregation of Korean Christians who used to use his church's building for a midweek service. He was impressed, he writes, "by the way they entered the worship center. Whether they were the first to arrive or came in after the service had already started, they immediately bowed in prayer for several moments before arranging their belongings, unbuttoning their coat, or acknowledging the presence of anyone else. This served as a reminder to their own hearts and to everyone else of their main purpose for that time. Most churches I'm familiar with could stand more of this kind of thing."

Listening by opening and noting

We can also be more active in hearing God's Word preached by listening with open bibles. This is for several reasons – among them the fact that we can check to make sure that what we hear is faithful to what the passage teaches, and true to its context and so on –

just like the Bereans, who even when it was the Apostle Paul's preaching they were hearing, "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" – and in this, they were commended by Luke as being more noble than the Thessalonians (Acts 17:11). But secondly – and I especially find this true – we concentrate better when we follow what is being preached, in print on our laps. And in this connection, note-taking during sermons has everything to recommend it as an aid to taking in, to better digest, the Word that is being expounded.

The value of tapes

Another way to hear the Word is to listen to tapes of sermons, or conference addresses, or even recorded readings of Scripture itself. This is a great way to add spiritual usefulness to time spent dressing, cooking, driving the car, ironing, knitting, and so on. Paul and I do this often on our 45-minute drives in and out of Christchurch – and have listened to dozens of hours of teaching from helpful preachers. However, one does have to be careful that one has caught everything that's been said – the fact that we're doing something else at the same time does mean that we aren't engaging our entire minds in the task of listening. It's often a good idea to listen to the same tape twice if it's a particularly good one – you'll be surprised how much you missed the first time! (And I find a third time never hurts – I can be a slow learner!)

Reading the Word

However, hearing God's Word is not all we can do these days. Since the invention of the printing press we have advantages the ancient Israelites and even faithful believers in medieval times never dreamed of, with our multiple, affordable copies of the Bible in our homes. We can read it, whenever we like, and wherever we like. They could only dwell on the portions they had been able to retain in their memory. But how much, how often should we read the Bible? I really like the passage Whitney quotes from John Blanchard's book, *How to Enjoy Your Bible*:

"Surely we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptation and pressure? *Every day!* Then how often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? *Every day!* To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear his voice, feel his touch, know his power? The answer to all these questions is the same: *every day!* As the American

evangelist D.L. Moody put it, "A man can no more take in a month's supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough for the next six months, or take sufficient air into his lungs at one time to sustain life for a week. We must draw upon God's boundless store of grace from day to day as we need it."

How should we get it?

So, given that we need this daily intake, how should we go about getting it? Whitney is very helpful here. The first thing he reminds us of is the need to discipline ourselves to *make* a time to do it – it won't simply happen by itself. He also discusses the relative merits of different times of the day. Just before you drop off to sleep is a good time to read some Scripture (What time of the day is *not* good?) – but if it is the only time we read, then we should try to find another time. We retain very little of what we read when we're tired and sleepy, and besides that, we tend to do very little evil in our sleep! We need to encounter Christ in the Scriptures when it will have a solid impact on our day (this is why many try to read and pray in the early morning).

It is an encouraging fact that even if we only devote a little time, we can still achieve a lot of Scripture reading. Did you know that tape-recorded readings prove that you can read through the entire Bible in 71 hours? (The average American watches that much television in less than two weeks – how about you?). Only fifteen minutes a day will take you through the Bible in a year.

Bible-reading plans

Whitney offers many practical suggestions for bible-reading plans. There are a number around, such as Robert Murray McCheyne's, which takes you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year. A simple plan of reading three chapters every day and five on Sunday will also take you through the Bible in a year. Whitney's own favourite plan is to read in five places each day. He begins with Genesis (the Law), Joshua (history), Job (poetry), Isaiah (the Prophets) and Matthew (the New Testament), and reads an equal number of chapters in each section. He likes this method because it varies his diet of Scripture, including all the types of bible teaching ("food groups", if you wanted to stretch the analogy!). I follow a plan that has me reading from both Old and New Testaments morning and evening, and one thing I often find is that it gives me a good, broad-sweep picture of the whole of Scripture. I might be reading in the Old Testament about the Day of Atonement, for instance – and then in the gospels about the crucifixion, or in the epistles about the meaning of the connection, and this helps me understand the message of the Bible as

a whole. I think it's very useful to have a rapid-reading plan for one's own devotional times, because it keeps the "big picture" of God's Word in front of us. Usually we're preparing each week for various in-depth group bible studies of individual Bible books, so a rapid-reading approach is a good complement.

Digesting properly

But of course we also read the Bible to be changed by it; and this doesn't happen unless we chew carefully on what we're reading. The Bible speaks of "meditating" – and this is the slow, thoughtful process of reflecting on the meaning of the passage we've read, thinking especially of how to apply it to our lives. One of the ways to do



this is to consider – how does this passage show me my sin? How does it teach me to think, act and live as God would have me? Meditation, as Whitney points out, is more than focused concentration, or using your powers of creative mental energy. Praying your way through a verse of Scripture means submitting your mind to the Holy Spirit's illumination of the text as He gives us spiritual perception to understand and obey it. Whitney gives an example from his own meditation on Psalm 119:50, which reads "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me." Whitney prayed through the text along these lines:

"Lord, You know the affliction I'm going through right now. Your Word promises to comfort me in my affliction. Your

Word can revive me in my affliction. I really believe this is true. Your Word has revived me in affliction during the past, and I confess my faith to You that it will revive me in this experience. I pray that You will revive me now through the comfort of Your Word."

And then, as he prayed through this text, the Holy Spirit began to bring to his mind truths from the Scriptures about the sovereignty of God over His church, His providence over the circumstances in his life, His power, and constant presence and love, and so on. And so his soul was revived – by God's Word.

Taking it to heart through your mind

There is much that Whitney has to say about the value of memorising Scripture, and if you've never been quite convinced about how this practice might help you to be changed by the Word, here is plenty of encouragement! I must admit I had often been dubious about Scripture memorising, wondering if sometimes people who rattle off their chapter, verse and text might be better to focus more on the meaning of the passage, and its overall context in Scripture. But having recently done a bit more in the way of memorising myself, I can see how useful it is! In memorising we get to concentrate so carefully of the individual parts of a text – and that helps meditation. Besides, as Philippians 4:8 teaches, whatever we think about is important. If we have a lot of Scripture filtering through our minds, we are far more likely to live it out.

A practical book

The thing I like about *Spiritual Disciplines* is that it is such a practical book. Whitney is clearly a man with depth of spiritual insight, and he's widely and helpfully read; but he is also a sensible pastor who knows the struggles we have in living out our faith. He knows what it's like to battle with tiredness, lethargy, sloth, boredom, busyness and the myriad daily distractions that the world sets in front of us. What he recommends is realistic, but compelling and challenging. I've found both my desire for, and perseverance in bible reading has improved greatly since my first encounter with this book. Why not see if it does the same for you?

[*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Donald Whitney, is available from NavPress, P.O. Box 6280, Christchurch, Phone +64 3 343 1990, Fax +64 3 343 1330, navpressnz@maxnet.co.nz]

Thoughts from a senior citizen

Moeder

Patricia van Laar

"You needn't go upstairs, Hannah, it's time for everyone to go back to work now."

My future mother-in-law gave a sigh of weariness at the voice of the farmer's wife. At the age of eleven, she had been sent to live and work on a farm, milking cows, hay making, general farm duties, only a small land girl, but also helping with some housework, for a pittance paid once a year. It was no fun for a child, but there could be no argument about it.

Each day the farm workers came to the house for mid-day dinner. When they had eaten, they all went upstairs for an afternoon snooze – except Hannah, who had to wash and dry the dishes by herself, pots and all, before she too could go for a well earned rest. Rarely was there time for that, though. Once the men were down again there was no question but that she should proceed with her afternoon tasks. She was not really part of the farm household, either. A bed, yes, but never was she invited into the 'mooie kamer' (the best room). Fed, yes, but no bread and butter as the family had - she must spread her bread with lard.

Hannah went each week on her bicycle to the local church for catechism classes. So little time did she have to herself, and so tired was she at the end of the day, that she used to learn her catechism while biking along to the class. And learn it she did. No complaints about this! But all her memorising

did not give her assurance of salvation.

Marriage for her must have seemed like a rescue mission! She was only about eighteen, but at least she now had her own household to manage. With eventually seven children, this was no bed of roses, but the difference was love. She was doing her tasks for her own, for a husband who loved and appreciated her, for children who loved and respected her. Together Vader and Moeder forged a Christian marriage, together they faced disappointments and sorrow as well as joy, together they worked for their family in home, garden and factory. Faithfully they brought their children up in the Christian faith, making sure they learnt the inevitable catechism. Together they struggled through the invasion and occupation, seeing two sons taken into forced labour in Germany, and losing a daughter, yet with faith intact. But still no assurance of salvation. Hannah did not take communion at church, she was not 'good enough'.

The first time we met

I first met Moeder in 1957, when on a tour of Europe with my brother and two English friends. Janet and I called at her house with a Dutch friend from the Hague, Otto. I knocked on the door and held out an address book with the name of her son John in it. She looked at it and said, "Hij is niet 'thuis Well, it was obvious what that meant. I stood on the doorstep wondering what to do now, and of course Otto came to the rescue.

What a lovely welcome we had. Marietje, the youngest daughter, went by bicycle to find her brother at the market. Christian hospitality was extended to us, even though Janet and I spoke not one word of the language. A few days later, joined by my brother and his friend, we four English-speaking foreigners stayed in Ede at Moeder's house for a night on our way to Germany.

What impressed us about these visits? Kindness and extended hospitality, for our tour was delayed by a car breakdown. But also at both Otto's and at Moeder's, it was the way in which it was not only grace that was said at dinner, but the Bible was also read. A beautiful habit, I thought.

The next year I spent about ten days visiting the Hague and Ede again, travelling on my own on a 'bronfiets' (auto-cycle). In the previous London winter, knowing that John had now returned to New Zealand and that no one else spoke English, I purchased a self-learning Dutch book, and spent many an evening teaching myself a minimum of the language. To my delight, when I returned, first to friends in Flemish-speaking Belgium and then on into Holland, I was able to hold very limited conversations in both countries, and understood enough to be able to talk to Moeder about our shared faith in the Lord. She also kept on talking to me about Evert Jan, and I kept wondering who this person was. It took me three or four days to work out that it was of course, the son now back in New Zealand, known there simply as 'John.'

The next time

It was six years before John and I eventually married. He always says, it was because I lived in Christchurch and he in Wellington, so we didn't meet very often! In 1967, at the age of seventy, Moeder came to visit us, she who had never before even been to Amsterdam. It was then I really learned to know and love my dear mother-in-law, her devotion to us, and above all her devotion to her Saviour. She also let us into a little secret. With the perceptiveness of a Christian mother, she said to herself when I left after my 'bronfiets' visit, "That is the girl Evert Jan will marry."

We soon realised that Moeder still she had no assurance of personal salvation. I remember John talking to her about this, and pointing out to her that salvation did not depend upon her and her faithfulness, but on the Lord and His faithfulness, upon His life given for us on the cross, and upon His



sure promise. Not what we do, but what He has done! She still doubted, though; she loved the Lord, and hoped she would one day make the grade, but was afraid she was not 'good enough'. Five years later we all went to Holland for six months, and these conversations resumed. She still did not take communion, not being good enough. John, feeling certain in his own heart of her salvation, said to me that though her lack of assurance was a pity for her, he would rather she were fearful, than that she should be full of misplaced confidence in herself and her own worthiness, while lacking a true faith. "One day she will be in His presence, and then she will know."

In 1979 John went back for a visit, taking with him our youngest daughter. What had happened in the intervening years to cause the change we do not know. One Sunday the church was holding a Communion Service. John stood up to go to the front. Moeder stood up too. Saying nothing, she went to the table, and for the first time in his life, he

saw his mother take the Communion bread and wine. Such a joy.

The story continues

Moeder's story does not end there. I like to think that in her old age the Lord gave this devoted lady who had been so busy all her life, who had left school at eleven, who had learnt her catechism on her bicycle, who had loved and nurtured a family of seven, and who was widowed for thirty-five years - I like to think that the Lord gave her many years of quiet when she could have time to spend with Him, getting to know Him better. The family had gone, she had her own little house to replace the large family home, living there until 89 years old, her children and grandchildren giving her such loving care as she needed, and then for the last three years of her life, moving into Marietje's home. She spent much time reading her beloved Bible. Twice friends of ours on holiday from New Zealand went from other parts of Holland to visit her, and both had precisely the same

story to tell, although these two incidents happened months apart. They each persuaded a relative to take them by car to see Moeder. On the way, in both cases the car driver said, "Why do you want to go all this way just to see an old lady?" Came the reply. "I met her in New Zealand, and I promised her son I would go." The journey proceeded, with a bit of grizzling on the part of the driver.

When they arrived at Moeder's door, her face lit up. She took them into her little lounge, and said, "I was just reading in the Bible." and she gave them a short resume of what she had been reading, and a little summary of her own thoughts on the passage. She then made then a 'cuppa' and sat for an hour or two of fellowship and catching up with the news from her far away family.

On the way home again, both the grumbling drivers said the same thing. "You could not have missed that, could you?"

Between You and Me!

Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are!

Dick Vanderpyl

I have a friend I have known right from kindergarten times, through the school years and on to volunteering to sign up for a new army immediately after World War II (1945). We had our training partly in Holland and partly in England and off we went to regain our Colonies in the East.

The Government had promised us a twelve months duty session overseas to give them time to call up a Division, which was named the 7-December Division.

After a three-year stint we returned home and settled down to a normal life of study or the workforce. After my migration to NZ we briefly lost contact and then gradually kept irregular contact, though we never forgot each other.

Both well in our seventies now, we still correspond with one another — at first by airmail, then e-mail or even a lengthy phone-call. All these years, with some gaps, we shared our thoughts! We could trust each other!

Here in New Zealand in our church communities, over time, we have developed long-term friendships, many lasting "till death do us part". Of course when moving away from one's environs, we seek compatible relationships and gradually trust one another to share joys, pains, sufferings and whatever else comes!

Of course there are times when we have no control over who to invite to our homes, whether regulars and/or newcomers. I've noticed over the years that the long-term friendships often have no more room to add to their own circle. This is quite normal and mostly it is difficult to penetrate their circle.

Many years ago one of our overseas sister-churches made a study of this phenomenon of fixed cliques¹. These people were not thrown at each other but over a period of years – approximately seven years according to a survey – they got to know more and more about each other and found compatibility, and dared to trust each other.

Over the years we developed a choice of compatible interests. For instance — as an example, we learned not to invite a mechanic and a lawyer at the same time. The one bores the other no end, as he or she hasn't a clue what the conversation is all about and finds himself or herself excluded from the conversation. It's a talent to make the right choices.

The point I am making is that each one, both host and guest, is to be near enough to enable a sensible conversation without one of them feeling an outsider. This can't happen, unless a wealth of general knowledge covers the gaps.

Groups which have gradually developed a trust with one another will generally grow in knowledge and gain wisdom, which may benefit the wider circle in one's community.

There are also those who have the mental trait of wanting to win their argument! They should never show off and think that they have the upper hand over their guests, although they may think so.

I'll guarantee — you may lose a good friend this way who may need you or vice versa — after all we are not alone on an island.

I confess that though I have times of loneliness, I also love to spend time alone. I also must confess that unexpected guests at times are regarded as time-stealers, for which I have been admonished in my inner circle.

(Footnotes)

¹ Cliques can be dangerous and enjoy a closed fellowship with no more openings unless there is a noticeable relationship or compatibility.

World in focus

Secretive survey alarms Christians in Gujarat, India

The government of India's Gujarat state is once again conducting surprise surveys of communities in the Patan district, heightening suspicions among local Christians that the census information will be misused by fundamentalist Hindus to stir up trouble in an area that suffered 443 major clashes between religious groups between 1970 and 2002. On May 25, plainclothes police conducted surveys at a Catholic retreat center in Dunggripur and a branch of the Daughters of the Cross Education and Medical Society. They asked questions about the background of students living there, the kind of food and facilities provided and whether any of the residents are converts from Hinduism. Officers also visited 10 Christian families, asking about sources of income, why they kept pictures of Jesus Christ and when they had embraced Christianity.

Although officials maintain that they are gathering information in order to ensure public security, Christians say their

questions suggest a different motive. The All India Christian Council filed a petition challenging the census, prompting the Gujarat high court to issue a suspension order.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799*

PCA elects Joel Belze Moderator at 31st General Assembly

For its 31st General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in America [PCA] selected Joel Belze as moderator. Some 1,500 commissioners, representing more than 300,000 members in 1,500 congregations, gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina, for the 10-13 June event.

An elder in the Covenant Reformed Presbyterian church of Asheville, Joel Belze is the Chief Executive Officer at God's World Publications and heir to a distinguished Bible Presbyterian family. The Belze patriarch Max taught all seven of his children the printing business while serving as pastor of the Cono Bible Presbyterian Church and

director of the Cono Christian School.

Joel Belze transformed the Presbyterian Journal from an independent Calvinist weekly into the broadly evangelical World Magazine. Observers also suggest that Belze's leadership contributed to the effective assimilation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church [Evangelical Synod] into the PCA and the progress of its leadership into positions of responsibility in the resulting denomination.

In 2002, the PCA General Assembly passed a resolution condemning racism and confessing any involvement in racial sin in the past. The same faction which sought to distance the denomination from its Old South roots is proposing a pastoral letter to address the issue and establish Biblical guidance for racial reconciliation.

The court will also consider giving civil authorities advice to promote traditional forms of marriage and adopt the proposed Marriage Amendment to the US constitution.

The premier issue of a proposed denominational magazine entitled by Faith is being distributed at the Assembly. Failure to develop a common vision in the denomination has hindered similar efforts in the past.

The nature of subscription to the confessional standards may be the most complex issue before the body. The 2002 Assembly began the process of amending the Book of Church Order to require registration of doctrinal differences but then permit presbyteries to accept good faith substitutions. Enough local jurisdictions have approved the changes for them to take effect if approved by the entire Assembly. However, enough controversy has also arisen that some presbyteries have suggested the matter be referred to a select committee for study and clarification before further action. The two principal factions describe their positions as Strict Subscription and Good Faith Subscription.

Live coverage of the General Assembly is available over the Internet at <http://www.pcaga.com>.

+ *Presbyterian Church in America, Office of the Stated Clerk, 1700 North Brown Rd., Lawrenceville, GA 30043-8122 Suite 105 (678) 825-1000*

27th Annual Synod of the Reformed Church (US)

The 257th annual Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) met at Eureka, South Dakota, from 19 -22 May 2003. The first Synod of what later was named the RCUS met at Philadelphia on 29 Sept. 1747. The RCUS has had a continuous existence ever since, and in the good providence of God today holds just as

We Are 50 Years Old

The Reformed Church of Hamilton will celebrate the fact that the Lord established a Church in Hamilton.

This celebration will take place on 22nd and 23rd November 2003, the Lord willing.

On Saturday there will a picnic lunch and a social evening with sketches and items and on Sunday afternoon a service of thanksgiving.

If you have any links, old or recent, with us then let us know whether you will be part of our celebrations.

Mail your expressions of interest before the 18th October, giving your Name and contact details.

To:

**The Reformed Church of Hamilton,
Attention Theo Grul**

P.O. Box 15-129, Hamilton.

Or alternatively email tcgrul@hnpl.net

strictly to the "Three Forms of Unity," the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt, as did our Fathers when they founded the first German-Reformed congregations in Pennsylvania in 1725. A book covering the full history of the RCUS is available for US\$7.00.

Diverse important issues and changes came before this 257th Synod, ranging from choosing a foreign missionary to handling appeals and complaints against one of the classes by one of its congregations.

Important matters of Sunday school material and seminary education also came before this Synod for consideration and resolution, as did continued work in publishing no-longer-available historical and theological source materials on the RCUS on CD ROM.

+ Dr. Robert Grossmann, 818 Madison St, Vermillion, SD 57069

Can music save your soul?

The selection of Roman Polanski for this year's Best Director Oscar raised eyebrows not because of the quality of his film, 'The Pianist', which is beyond question, but because of the immoral past of the director, which is also beyond question. Polanski was unable to accept his Oscar in person because an arrest warrant is still current for him in the United States for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl.

The irony dripped like rain. The film reminded us again of the horror of the Holocaust, and of how this act of ultimate immorality should not ever be forgotten. But is it Polanski's plea that his own horrific moral lapses be forgotten? On what basis can the past be forgiven or forgotten?

Fascinating and profound questions abound. However, another twist in these ironies and moral ambiguities was the way in which Polanski's screenplay tinkered with the true story on which the film was based. In the film, Jewish concert-pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman miraculously avoids death in the Warsaw ghetto, in large part through the actions of a German officer, who listens to Szpilman play the piano, and then hides him for the remainder of the way.

Why did the German officer take this extraordinary risk? The film suggests that the power and beauty of Szpilman's music in some way touches the soul of the German officer, who cannot bring himself to destroy a man with such a gift. Even in the midst of the most harrowing and self-destructing evil, the transforming power of music softens the heart of one of Hitler's henchmen. Or does it?

What the film leaves out, but which is quite clear in Szpilman's memoir on which the screenplay was based, is that the German officer was a sincere Catholic believer, who detested Nazism and

repeatedly risked his life to save other Jews from death throughout the war. What in the film is an almost inexplicable decision to save Szpilman, thanks to the transforming power of music, was in reality a decision based on the officer's belief in God and his conviction of the evil of Nazism.

Once again, Christian is edited out.

+ Tony Payne in 'The Briefing', June 2003, www.matthiasmedia.com.au

New Zealand gets another Reformed denomination

The General Assembly of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand [GPCNZ] draws together seven congregations ranging in background from membership in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to independency. According to published reports, in addition to 80 people from local congregations, there were several representatives from the Presbyterian Church of Australia - including Moderators John Wilson (Victoria), Ian McIver, (Queensland) and David Kiewit (Westminster).

The next General Assembly is planned for 28-30 August at the Covenant Presbyterian Church [GPCNZ], Manurewa, in Auckland. Regional contacts are Peter Boyd (Auckland); Ian Bayne, (Wellington); Geoff MacPherson, (Christchurch); and Mark Smith, (Dunedin).

+ Covenant Presbyterian Church [GPCNZ], 77 Rogers Road, Manurewa, Auckland, PO Box 75 452
Manurewa, New Zealand covenantchurch@ihug.co.nz

ARP Synod 199 meets in South Carolina and changes names

The public is so accustomed to the name ARP that some people do not even know the name stands for Associate Reformed Presbyterian, the largest continuing body of Covenanters in North America. Similarly, annual meetings are always held at Bonclarken in North Carolina.

This year was in a class by itself.

The 199th General Synod of ARP Church met at Erskine College, Due West, South Carolina. Dr. Michael Horton from the United Reformed Church addressed the body, and Dr. Dan Doriani, pastor of Central Presbyterian Church [EPC] in St. Louis, led worship services.

Then synod changed the denomination's corporate name to "General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church." For legal purposes, the Board of Stewardship previously held the corporate title. After that Bonclarken Assembly Grounds changed to Bonclarken Conference Center.

Delegates approved a budget of US\$2,736,999 for 2004 after a warning that anticipated resources appear insufficient to meet the expressed needs of

all agencies.

The only vote requiring a delegate count came after debate on a memorial from Mississippi Valley Presbytery seeking a change in the Form of Government to allow churches to bar children from voting in congregational meetings. The memorial failed.

The Ecclesiastical Commission on Judiciary Affairs was instructed to investigate why World Witness has seen a significant loss of missionaries over the last 15 years. The motion approved by delegates claimed that "the loss of many of these missionaries has been associated with a breakdown of relationship or confidence with World Witness management."

World Witness has long been the leader in Presbyterian foreign missions with a field force far larger than its denominational membership base would suggest. The central office has been the resource center for other Calvinist mission agencies such as the mission arm of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

A proposal to satisfy Canadian tax laws and allow Canadian churches to support denominational causes without penalty passed.

Presbyteries were encouraged to require from congregations seeking affiliation a written affirmation that the church accepts the doctrines and theology set forth in the ARP Standards.

+ Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1 Cleveland St. Ste 110, Greenville, SC 29601 (864) 232-8297

Pakistan acquits illiterate Christian of blasphemy

After four and one-half years in prison for alleged blasphemy against Islam, Pakistani Christian Aslam Masih was acquitted 4 June in a 15-minute appeals hearing before the Lahore High Court. In his mid 50s and illiterate, Masih was arrested in November 1998 on charges that he had desecrated the Quran by hanging verses from the Muslim holy book in a charm around a dog's neck.

Although the prosecution only produced hearsay evidence against Masih, he was found guilty in May 2002 and sentenced to double life-sentences. In overturning Masih's lower court conviction, Justice Najam ur-Zaman reportedly took what one observer called "a very aggressive attitude against the prosecution," noting that the prosecution's chief witness had retracted the statement attributed to him by the police.

Seven other Christians remain jailed in Pakistan on drawn-out charges of blasphemy.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

A note from your pastor. Retaining a proper balance in prayer life is necessary. I slip at times into having much more to ask God compared with how much I thank Him. Simply praising Him, sadly, often comes in at third place. Perhaps you are familiar with the well-known acronym for a balanced prayer life, ACTS. It goes like this:

- A** Take time to Adore God and worship Him for Who He is, see Isaiah 9:6b.
- C** Remember to daily Confess to Him for the ways in which you have been disobedient, see 1 John 1:8-9.
- T** Always remember to give Thanks in prayer. God provides abundantly, 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
- S** The last area of prayer is Supplication.

Here we ask God to meet needs, Philippians 4:6-7.

Bishopdale

This week Rev Michael Flinn and I will be leaving for Australia to represent our NZ Reformed Churches at the synod of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia to be held in Geelong. I will be at the synod for about ten days and then will stay on in Geelong to make my annual visit to the Reformed Theological College with Rev John Rogers.

A Combined Ascension Day Service will be held at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale at 7.30 pm this Thursday, 29th May. Mr Jim Nugteren will lead the service and Rev Jim Klazinga will preach. Supper will be served following the service. Would you please bring a contribution for the supper.

News from the churches. Willem and Janette Pieters: Rev Willem Pieters served in the Reformed Church of Dunedin from 1991-1996 and since then has been serving the Reformed Churches of Zimbabwe and working as a school chaplain. He has accepted a call to the Free Presbyterian Church of St James in

Bedfordview, Johannesburg. He will be installed on the 31st of August, the Lord willing. Bedfordview is a well-established suburb of Johannesburg not far from the International Airport and the congregation of St James has a good cross section of people. He will be assistant minister to Rev David Jones, a Welshman, who has been in the congregation for the past 25 years.

The Men's Group will meet tomorrow evening, Monday, at 7.15 pm at the home of Rob and Henny Moot (33 Sharnbrook Lane, Regent Park). We will be considering the topic: "A Man and His Wife". I'm sure your wife will appreciate you coming!

Bucklands Beach

The camp at Clarks Beach was a great blessing for everyone who attended. For confirmation, ask anyone who was there. The subject, 'Then, now and Tomorrow' – a focus on the vision of our congregation in an increasing multicultural setting with people of reformed persuasion from a number of different backgrounds – was stimulating and challenging. We all agree that both the congregation as a whole and the leadership need to discuss and pray about these things.

Christchurch

Thank you. Henk and Maria Fietje thank you all for making the occasion of our 50 years wedding anniversary, unforgettable for us. The cards we received, phone calls, flowers etc. are all expressions of your love. Matthew 28:20b was our wedding text" And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." The Lord has blessed us in many ways. Great is His faithfulness! For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

From the pastor: We rejoice with Mr. & Mrs. Johan & Johanna Janssen as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this Thursday, 29 May.

We farewell Christine Alberts who leaves this Wednesday for the United States for 2 months. Christine will be aiding in a summer camp held at North Cleaveland, Atlanta, Georgia through CCUSA. We wish her the Lord's blessing and safe travels while she is away and pray that she may be safely returned to us.

Chapel service. It is our turn to help at the Chapel Service on Sunday 8 June. Please meet at 10.15 am at the Chapel at Christchurch Public Hospital. This area of work is not well supported from our church and we would like to see you there. Due to the lack of people that are able to attend, we are not able to visit all the wards before the service. It would be good to see people

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Mr. W. Stolte on [0064] 6- 377 5519
or E-mail willemstolte@extra.co.nz

that are not normally able to make it. Please come and support us. There is free parking at the Old Nurses Hostel.

Dunedin

South Island Ladies' Presbyterial. Because the last date given clashed with the Wearable Arts Festival in Nelson, the new date for the presbyterial has been set for Saturday 4th October. Please give consideration as to whether you would be able to attend. It is a wonderful chance to encourage our Christian sisters and also an opportunity for building friendships.

Foxton

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

Meditation: At our congregational meeting, it was good to hear what so many people do to make the body of Christ work as it does in our fellowship. Yet, sometimes it is easy to forget what people do behind the scenes to make the body run smoothly. For most of us, these things go unnoticed, yet it happens. Now of course, many of these people would not want any public recognition, for they see it as their way of serving the King. Yet, just sometimes, it is good to say thankyou as a body to those who quietly work behind the scenes.

One thing we can be sure of is that, even though we may not notice, the Master Himself sees what is done in his kingdom for his Name's sake. In fact the least service done to those who work for His cause is observed and rewarded by Him. For some, this quiet work in God's kingdom may seem trifling when compared to the more public roles some of us have, but they are not insignificant in the sight of God. God notices those who help in the kingdom and are kind as Lydia was to Paul, as well as those who oppose the work in the kingdom as Diotrephes was to John. All is written down and will be brought to light on the last day.

Thankfully, we have many people in this fellowship who are helpers. Yet it is a worthwhile question to ask oneself – am I a helper, or do I hinder Christ's work and cause in this world? Do we assist the 'prophets' and 'righteous men' or do we impede them? Do we assist the little ones, or do we cause them to stumble? Are we a light to each other and the community, or have we lost our saltiness? These are serious questions,

worthy of our attention.

Hamilton

Pastoral. Amazing, New Zealanders celebrating the first ascent to the top of Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hilary fifty years ago, but nary a mention of the ascension of Jesus of Nazareth to the highest heavens and the most powerful position of the whole of God's immense creation and taking millions of earth's poorest citizens with him. Mind you, I don't mean to knock Sir Ed's achievement. And I do think it is a big feather in the cap of New Zealand. Aussies eat your heart out! But that hardly a Christian thinks it worthwhile to

celebrate Christ's glorious achievement, that's sad. For if God in His mighty power had not raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power etc., you could kiss the whole message of salvation for sinners, good bye. For it is only as the exalted Lord in highest heaven itself, that Jesus gave His Spirit to the church and delivers sinners from the clutches of the forces of evil. Without the Ascension of Jesus there would be no church, no christians, no saved. I realise, the Ascension is not like Jesus' birth or death. It's hard to get sentimental about the Ascension. It's hard

LETTERS FROM THE CHURCHES

Wanganui

Greetings from Wanganui, the "river city". It has been quite a while since our last report and an update is in order. After a long dry summer Wanganui has had the much needed rain and looks green again.

As a member of a home mission church, people often ask you: How is the church in Wanganui? Are you growing, do you get more people in? This is very encouraging, it's nice to know that others care about this and ask these questions, yes we are growing and we do get more people coming to our church. Although not in a dramatic big way perhaps but the number of regular visitors from the community is growing steadily. Our Minister Rev. Gary Milne is meeting with a number of these visitors for Catechism, and Bible study on a one to one or one to two basis. Our prayer is that the Lord will bless these people and open their hearts for His word.

As a congregation we also feel blessed with Gary's Ministry among us, his sermons are teaching us in the way of the Lord and are therefore very upbuilding. We also appreciate Gary and Carol's caring attitude and hospitality to all of us.

Our youngest member is Ruben Frits, born to Steffen and Jant Akkerman last year, and now we are looking forward to the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. John and Rachel Haakma with their children as they will move from Australia to join our congregation in July, Lord willing.

We meet fortnightly for Bible study, the study is from Samuel and is prepared by Gary.

Every first Monday of the month we have our women's Fellowship meetings, we start at 12 noon for a shared lunch and have our Bible study afterwards. And every first Sunday of the month at half past one we visit New Vista Rest Home to sing some songs for the residents, this contact has since been increased when Gary was asked to give a devotion once a month during the week. A number of us come along for the singing and to have some fellowship with the people there.

Our Minister also writes devotions for the Wanganui Chronicle from time to time and the feedback he is getting from this is proof that people are reading these.

The children meet every Sunday Morning before the Service for Sunday School, and although small we also have a church library, we borrow books from our "mother church" in Palmerston North and members of our group have also put some of their books in for others to read.

We are very thankful for the different organists/pianists from Palmerston North and Foxton that serve us in this way, the latest musicians on this list are 14 years young and very ably lead us in our singing.

Our Services are at 11 AM and 2 PM, with a shared coffee/lunch in between, we warmly invite you to come and visit us sometime. You find us in the Lutheran church, on the corner of Harrison and Liverpool Street.

You can also visit us at our web page: www.wanganuireformedchurch.org.nz.

And so although small in number yet under God's guidance and protection we strive to serve Him in this part of New Zealand.

With kind regards,
Bep de Jonge.

to cook up an appropriate shopping binge. Celebrating Christ's ascension is nothing less than celebrating the power of the living God And the victory of Jesus over sin and death.

Invitation. You're cordially invited to join Mrs Gre Bosgra in celebrating her 80th birthday on Wednesday in the afternoon from 1.00pm at her home. No presents please. Instead she would welcome your gift for the Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Palmerston North

We have the privilege and the joy of celebrating the sacrament of baptism today with the Huizinga family, when Nathan Albert receives the sign and seal of God's covenant love. We pray God's richest blessings for him, and we rejoice with the family, and seek the Lord's help and strength for them as they raise Nathan in the Lord.

John and Miep Vroegh are still celebrating 50 years of married life together. I asked John what their wedding text was, which is Hebrews 13.5, and so I will be preaching on this text this morning. If anyone has a significant wedding anniversary (I know they are all significant), and you would like me to preach on your wedding text, please let me know.

Chris & Julie Kavanagh will be leaving us tomorrow to go to England, and visit family; we wish you both traveling mercies and pray

that the Lord will bless you and (DV) you will return to us safely in due time on the 9 July. We will remember you in our prayers.

Pukekohe

Session met with Malcolm Tasker, an elder at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Manurewa to learn more about the mission trip he is planning to Japan for three weeks in December. The trip is being supported by his church and will involve a team of 13 people including Geraldine Loef from our congregation. This will be the third time that Malcolm has led a group to Japan. The group will hold concerts in Old Peoples Homes, Day Cares and Schools while also proclaiming Christ. They will be working with missionaries based in Japan and giving encouragement to the Japanese Christians in the churches they will visit. The session is in full support of this mission work and would encourage the congregation to pray for Malcolm and his team as they continue with their planning for the trip.

This morning we will witness the baptism of Cleo Eleanore Bosgra. Praise God as we once again are reminded of His faithfulness by this sign and seal of the Covenant.

We rejoice with Ruben and Teresa Zandman on the safe arrival of their baby daughter 'Mackenzie Elise' and praise God

for his Goodness. Congratulations also to the Loefs with their new granddaughter and niece

Silverstream

From the Heeringas. Instead of Peter's intended by-pass operation on May 29, he was admitted a week earlier and came home on Thursday. According to the Doctors, the healing process went remarkably well and he feels accordingly. We like to express our sincere thankfulness for the many gestures, phone calls, and prayers made on behalf of us by many of you. We like to thank Him who is so faithful and watches over all His children. Visits should be limited, so please ring either Sjoerdje or Sybella first. Again, our sincere thanks to all of you. Peter and Sjoerdje

We give thanks and rejoice with the Knol and Archbald families with the wedding yesterday of Jos and Lauren. We pray that the Lord may add His blessing to the vows you both made and they He may also draw you closer to Him as you begin your married life together.

Wainuiomata

Floods and inconveniences. As most are aware, we had some serious flooding through the church this Monday evening. Because the far lane of Wainuiomata Road was full of water, torrents flowed over the median and down the steps and driveway of the church. Water was flowing right through our entire church building. Because of the damage caused, many of our rooms are not functional at this time. Your pastor cannot use his study for the time being and can be reached at his home. It may take some days before all is back to normal. We thank you for your patience and cooperation as we clean up and allow things to dry out.

We give thanks to God for the safe arrival of Lydia Elizabeth, a daughter and sister for Al & Sandy, David, Jonathan, Zackery & Rebecca, on Thursday evening, weighing 8lb 4oz. Mother and daughter are both doing well.

We also give thanks to God for being with Joop & Willy de Boer during 50 years of married life. Their wedding anniversary is on Tuesday. We hope you have a blessed day together reminiscing with friends and family.

Congratulations to Luke & Venessa, Caitlin and Jemma on the safe arrival of their new son and brother, Jared John, early Saturday morning, weighing 6lb 12oz.

Congratulations to Maarten and Engeltje Schuitema on their 50th wedding anniversary on Thursday. May the Lord bless you with many more to come!!

Wellington

Today we celebrate! In the morning service we give thanks as we listen to the public profession of faith of Natasha and Cassandra

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

singles convention

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

- When:** 3rd Jan - 10th Jan 2004
- Where:** Greenhills Murrumbidgee Conference Centre, 1437 Cotter Road, Cotter (Canberra) ACT, Australia.
- Cost:** \$300-\$350 dollars (to be determined)
- Activities:** Generally include- Topical bible studies, Sports, Sight seeing, formal dinner, leisure time etc.
- Transport:** Own, Air, Rail or Bus.

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

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

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

Minnee, and Jenny Snoek. (Third generation of founding members!)

The afternoon service will be a thanksgiving service for our (50th) Jubilee as Reformed Church of Wellington. This service will be held in the Congregational Church, Cambridge Terrace, starting at 3.00pm. Service sheets will be provided, having the full text of the hymns.

50th anniversary thanksgiving service. This will be held at 3pm this afternoon at the Congregational Church on Cambridge Terrace. Please note that there is no on-site parking though you could drop off passengers in front of the church then find a park on one of the side streets or Cambridge Tce itself. A crËche will be available. After the service we will share afternoon tea together. Look

forward to seeing you all there.

We rejoice with the Snoek family in the celebration of the 50th wedding anniversary of bro and sr Snoek sr (Aart & Addy), and we welcome their family and friends from overseas and within the country. May the Lord grant us to rejoice in His goodness!

Missions in focus

ICRC Missions Conference February 2003

Janice Reid

This past February saw three people from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand hunting out a huge hotel in Pattaya, a beach resort two hours south of Bangkok, Thailand. Rev. John Goris (Wellington), Prof. Anton Meister (Palmerston North/OMB) and yours truly. I was just along for the ride! No, seriously—I was in the area for two other FEBC events, and both FEBC and the OMB kindly allowed me the extra time out to attend the regional missions conference of the ICRC.

In case you haven't heard those initials before, ICRC stands for the "International Conference of Reformed Churches." RCNZ is a member, and Rev. Goris is the convenor of the ICRC missions committee. This regional conference was about Reformed outreach in the Asia/Pacific area.

The conference was an excellent one, very ably hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). One of their missionaries is based in Thailand; he worked extremely hard to provide suitable facilities for the conference. And he succeeded: I've never been in such a huge hotel! But all I saw of the sea was a walk in the dark, the night the conference ended we were too busy with meetings, the rest of the time! Nonetheless, grateful thanks to our Korean brothers for their generous hospitality and concern for our needs during the conference.

The missions conference was attended by about thirty ministers and me! There were

a couple of wives present, which took the edge off being the only female delegate. I was embarrassed to have a seat in the very front-and-centre, beside Rev. Goris and Prof. Meister. But in the end it was a help: at the last minute the PCK secretary was unable to attend the conference, and since I had a computer I was able to take notes of the proceedings. Nice to feel useful!

What we talked about

The theme for this conference was: "Poverty, persecution and pluralism."

Prof. Meister presented a paper on the subject of poverty, drawing especially on his experience as a director for the NZ board of Tear Fund. Prof. Meister oversees the micro-finance projects that TFNZ runs in the Philippines: teaching people in poor communities how to become self-sufficient, providing small loans to set up businesses, and so on. Micro-finance, done from a Christian standpoint, is an effective way to reach out to people in the community, and also to help fellow church members who suffer from extreme poverty.

The second subject, persecution, was dealt with by a number of people. A delegate from Pakistan, Rev. Gerald Mall, spoke about the way in which Christians are (mis)treated

in his country. Indonesian and Indian delegates also shared stories of the persecution that is often experienced by believers in those nations. It left me wondering how we, in New Zealand, can ever imagine we really know hardship. Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted.

Pluralism, the third main theme of the conference, was discussed by Dr. Ho Jin Jun, head of the Mission Board of the PCK, and host for this regional conference. Dr. Ho described the trend in Asia (and, indeed other countries) to mix elements of false religions, superstitious beliefs and even New Age philosophy in with Christian faith. Also, many people who profess to be Christian think these other religious expressions are valid, containing a real hope of eternal life. When people hold to such error, it's hard to confront them with the message of Truth; they often don't understand it. Pluralism in the Asia/Pacific region is a strong evidence of the need for solid, biblical teaching in the churches. And missions is a way to make that possible!

A bonus during the conference was a paper presented by Dr. John Davis, a Brit who's been an OMF missionary in Thailand for more than 40 years. Dr. Davis described



Prof. Anton Meister and Janice Reid, our representatives at the ICRC Asia/Pacific regional conference.

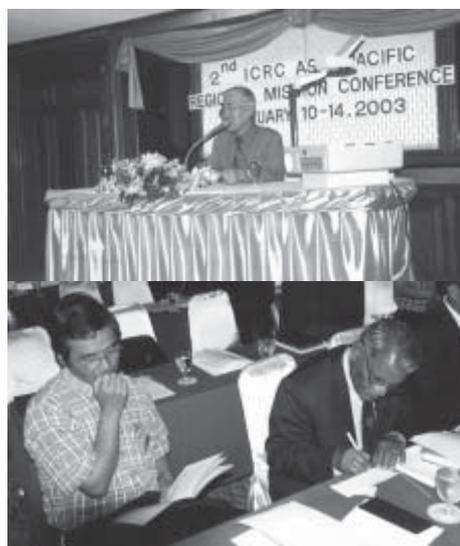


Group photo of the delegates that attended the ICRC Asia/Pacific regional conference.

some of the key teachings of Buddhism which are inherently weak, and which Christians can use to confront Buddhists about the falseness of their faith. Dr. Davis brought with him two of his books—one, an introduction to Buddhism (from a Christian perspective!) and the other, a discussion of how to present the Gospel message in a way that Buddhists can understand (ie, contextualisation). Guess who snapped them up!!

What's happening where

During the conference there was time given over for "country reports." I was able to give a brief description of my (then) work for FEBC, and other missionaries did the same. Rev. Stephen 't Hart was present, and he described his work with the Reformed Church of Papua New Guinea, in Ekoro and Port Moresby.



The largest contingent at this conference was from the PCK, which has many missionaries serving in various parts of the world (1). They had delegates present from Japan, the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Thailand, and Tajikistan (and maybe more!). I was delighted with a comment made by the Taiwan delegate. He said that he's serving in a church that was planted by the late Rev. Oppelaar. Members of that congregation still speak of him with affection and gratitude, for his sacrifice in working among them to establish the church they have today.

We spent quite a bit of time learning about—and discussing—HIV/AIDS projects in India. These are not the C.A.R.E. project supported by CRCA and the national diaconate: but other projects, in other parts of the country, that were established by our Reformed brothers who attended the conference. They could all benefit from financial assistance, as they seek to reach out to hurting people in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was most touched, however, by learning about the plight of our brothers in West Timor and neighbouring Indonesian islands. West Timor is the place where many thousands of East Timorese fled during the civil war in the lead-up to the Independence of East Timor. Reformed believers there have helped the refugees so much that they, themselves, no longer have anything: no resources, no money or food to provide for their own families. Media reports have criticised these people for leaving the refugees on the streets, but the truth is simply that they have been helping...and now they can help no more, because there's nothing left to give.

One brother from the Reformed churches in this region explained that many pastors

are leaving the ministry: their average wage is \$8US per month. On that, they cannot afford food for their children, let alone rent, clothing, school fees and all the other essentials of daily life. I'd love to see our churches reaching out to help these brothers in their extreme need. Please pray with me that the Lord who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, will send a few their way!

In sum

Overall, the conference left me with a very positive impression. Reformed missions in the Asia Pacific region are alive, and well, and reaching out in the name of our gracious Lord to many who do now know Him. But there is still a tremendous amount to be done. Therefore pray to the Lord of the Harvest, that He would send out more workers into His harvest field. Might you be one of them?

**SPROUT Missions
Day Conference with
Frank van Dalen**

Saturday, 26th April

Matthew Bartlett

I arrived at the Reformed Church early on a chilly Masterton Saturday morning for the SPROUT Missions Conference. The church buildings there are currently undergoing a major upgrade, which were half-way finished at that point. The Rev. Frank van Dalen turned up. We opened the building and put the jug on and waited for the masses to mass.

Somewhat fewer people showed up for the first session than we had expected. Frank proved flexible and resourceful, however, and arranged the group into a circle. This made for a friendly and intimate discussions, rather than lectures to an audience.

Frank centred his talks around Timothy. In the first session, he painted a picture of Timothy's background, detailing his spiritual and physical lineage. Timothy was Paul's "true son in the faith". When Barnabas and Paul descended on Lystra healing and preaching, the crowd called them gods and wanted to sacrifice to them! Barnabas is Zeus, the king of the gods, and Paul is Hermes, Zeus' son and the messenger of the gods. Some of the Jews came and convinced the crowd to kill Paul. They took him outside the city and stoned him till they thought he was dead. Paul wasn't dead though; after they'd left he got up and went straight back into the city. This kind of bravery was a very hard act for timid Timothy to follow! As for his physical lineage - Timothy was the son of a Greek man and a believing Jewish woman. This fact is very significant. Timothy is in a way a symbol of the widening of God's gracious covenant. A big issue all through the New Testament is the incorporation of the Gentiles back into God's people. Frank really brought the characters and situations in Acts (and other New Testament books) to life. He described Acts as a missionary book. I was inspired to want to find out much more about Timothy's life, and I expect others were too.

Further sessions Frank took gave us an appreciation for what life is like for missionary families. We were given an idea of the kind of hardships that can arise. Frank gave us some very practical suggestions for resolving disputes. We stand in a long line of disputing Christians (I'm thinking of Paul and Barnabas in Acts chapter 15), so I think it is worthwhile to paraphrase those suggestions briefly here:

- Recognise each other as members of Christ
- Reaffirm your primary goals/mission statement
- Repeat what you've heard in your own words, to avoid misunderstanding
- Resist the temptation to come to a conclusion before you've heard everyone
- Respect the other's opinions, and don't gossip
- Rest before an intense discussion
- Rely on the Lord's leadership, seek Him in prayer & fasting
- Respond to the positive and acceptable parts of the other's position
- Research alternative solutions to the problem

Weaving together the scriptures

Frank had an excellent way of weaving together explanations of Bible passages with

helpful applications for our lives.

After the morning sessions, we ate a delicious lunch together (provided by Mrs Goodin) and had a group photo. When all the food was gone, we headed upstairs to view a PowerPoint presentation about Islam, with a time of questions afterwards.

The Rev. Bruce Hoyt has recently returned from a short trip to Myanmar (formerly Burma). He came (resplendent in Burmese costume) to the conference in the afternoon to tell us about his experiences there. There may be some opportunities over in Myanmar to teach some of their young people computer skills. Please contact Bruce if this sounds interesting to you.

Frank closed the day with a devotion entitled 'The Missionary Jar', on 2 Corinthians 4:6,7 - 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us'. We prayed together and sang a few hymns beautifully before everyone went home. It was an excellent Saturday. Unfortunately only about 25 of us showed up. If you have any ideas about how to attract more of our folk to these sorts of events, I'd love to hear them!

Matthew Bartlett can be contacted on

mhjb@hotmail.com

This was written for the SPROUT

Committee (sproutnz@yahoo.com)

MIF prayer notes

1. The Overseas Mission Board and the Vaatstra family ask prayer for our continued prayers for somebody to help Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart in their ministry in Papua New Guinea. While the Hagoorts are currently considering how they can help the church in Port Moresby, there is also great need for an ordained minister to join the work. Pray that the 't Harts would be strengthened for service and rejoice in the ministry God has given them, even though they are currently working without the support of fellow-missionaries. The OMB also asks prayer for more missions-consciousness in our churches; and for God's strength and deliverance for believers who suffer in Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

2. Kevin and Machi Rietveld in who work for the CRCA the Solomon Islands have these requests:

- a. Pray for the Solomon Islands as a nation which has collapsed economically

IN TOUCH

Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The costs is \$15 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bibles studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the **National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven, Upper Hutt. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)**

and has serious law and order concerns. Pray for Australian and New Zealand Governments who are working at a 'rescue package' to help restore this failing nation.

b. Pray for a suitable replacement to be found for Frank De Hoog, who is finishing at the end of the year. We are looking for a competent builder to head up the project and development ministry and to coordinate SWIM Teams.

c Pray that Kevin and Machi Rietveld may get much needed rest during their current long service leave.

3. Walter and Jeanette Hagoort have recently returned from a short visit to Papua New Guinea to assess opportunities for missionary service. Please pray for Hukanui session and for the Hagoorts as they discuss future options.

4. Janice Reid should be in Jakarta by the time you read this: training radio announcers on behalf of FEBC Indonesia. Please pray for safe travel, for effective training that has a lasting impact on those trained, and for listeners who tune in to FEBC's broadcasts. Janice plans to spend up to two months with FEBC Indonesia.

5. Jared Berends will be back in New Zealand by now, but he asks continued prayer for the church he attended in Mongolia. Jared asks us to intercede for the Lord's blessing as the church seeks to obtain government registration, "which is a long and lengthy and often frustrating process." They are also looking for a building to buy or rent for their Sunday service. Pray also for Jared as he settles back into life in New Zealand a transition that is often stressful, after a time overseas in missionary service.

6. Christchurch radio team met on Queen's Birthday Weekend to consider the how-to's of putting programs on the local community station, Plains FM. Rev. Jim Klazinga, minister of Cornwall Street Reformed Church, will produce the main messages, and a good team is joining him to provide feedback, gather program resources, and do the technical work. Please pray for them as this new venture is launched. Pray also for Masterton and Hastings congregations where dedicated people have produced programs on their respective community stations for a considerable time.

(1) Dr. Ho Jin Jun, in his paper, noted that Korea (all denominations) has sent out more than 12,000 missionaries to date!!

Country profile: *Cuba*

Cuba became independent from Spain in 1898. Castro's revolution brought Communism to power in 1959. After 30 years of vigorously exporting revolution to Latin America and Africa, Cuba remains one of the last protagonists of Communism. The police state is diplomatically isolated and politically paranoid, but with no viable alternative government, the old dictatorship continues.

The early years of Communist rule saw strict control of all church activities and repression of religious freedom, but since 1990 the degree of pressure has lessened. The 1992 constitution declared Cuba 'secular' and discrimination against Christians, illegal. In practice, periodic harassment of Catholics and Evangelicals continues. 47% of the population claims to be Christian, but three quarters of those are Roman Catholic.

Pray for Cuba:

1. Praise the Lord that the void created by Communism is being filled by Christianity. During the '90s there was rapid church growth despite ongoing hostility and frequent acts of harassment against Christians.
2. Praise God for greater freedom to print Bibles in Cuba or import from abroad.
3. Pray for healing of the wounds inflicted by Marxism:
 - a) An estimated 50,000+ lost their lives and 500,000 were imprisoned for ideological reasons.
 - b) Over one million Cubans have become ideological or economic refugees — many in Florida, USA.
 - c) Economic hardship is widespread; survival is only possible in the illegal 'black' economy and through deceit. Many have turned to crime, drug-running and prostitution in their need.
4. The Protestant churches were decimated by several waves of emigration to the USA, a move encouraged by the authorities. Recovery and growth was slow, but since 1989 growth has become spectacular with churches springing up in every corner of Cuba. Evangelicals now outnumber church-going Catholics. The 1,250 evangelical congregations in 1990 has increased to possibly 4,500 congregations and a further 10,000 house

groups. A high proportion of the new Christians are young people. Pray that this growth may continue whatever the political situation.

5. Persecution of Christians has been severe, Catholics suffering even more than Protestants. While it has lessened somewhat in recent times, it still continues. Pray for continued courage and fortitude for believers, and for complete religious freedom.
6. Leadership for the churches is a pressing need. Many Christian leaders had to flee or were expelled in the years following the revolution. Pray that the number of trained leaders might be multiplied. Pray also for visionary leadership for the churches that enables them to cope with the massive changes soon to come. Freedom can be dangerous.



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