

## **Report of Ministers & Wives' Conference**

I have no doubt that I speak on behalf of all the ministers and wives in the RCNZ when I say that our last ministers and wives conference (21-26 May 2012) was one of the best we ever had. The venue was good, and the key-note speaker and other speakers were very encouraging and their messages very uplifting.

This was the first time that our conference was held at the **Silverstream Retreat** in Upper Hutt – even just *that* was a huge improvement! This retreat is a partly renovated old military complex. All of us had accommodation in one wing of the complex where we also had our breakfasts and lectures. We had central heating (even in the hallways) and well renovated modern bathrooms with enough showers – just right for a large group like ours!

Talking of a **large group** – apart from one minister's couple, we were all there in large numbers. Even some retired ministers and vicars attended. Thus, we were blessed to have with us also Carl & Joyce Larsen and John Goris (he read to us some of his most recent, heart-warming, poems), and Vicar Jan-Erik Stolte with his wife, Georgina.

It was a good time of bonding. Indeed, among us we felt a great sense of unity fostered and fuelled by all sorts of activities – from a series of excellent “ice-breaker” games, filled with laughter, to the more serious moments of devotions and marvellous lectures.

The **weather**, too, was a great help: it was mostly fine which allowed us to walk, undisturbed from rain or mud, to the dining hall for lunch & dinner. Yes, you read correctly – lunch and dinner, because we did our own breakfasts. And shall we ever forget the highlights of breakfast: the Kloosterman's scrambled eggs, and the waffles by Carol & Leo de Vos!

Our **key-note speaker** was Peter Brain who has been a pastor for more than 36 years in the Anglican Church in Australia, serving in dioceses in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Armidale (where he is now Bishop). The Lord certainly blessed and encouraged us all through the rich, yet fun-filled, lectures of this very engaging speaker. Peter Brain covered, among other, the following topics with us:

- The importance of self-care
- The pastor's family
- Sexual temptation in the ministry
- Justification by faith practically applied in the minister's life
- Burnout
- Depression doesn't have to be depressing

Because Peter Brain has a real pastor's “heart,” we as pastors, who mostly don't get pastored, felt absolutely ministered to, uplifted and most encouraged for our tasks.

Our **free time** came in the afternoons when some played golf, some others went fishing, and yet some others went for walks in the Kaitoke Regional Park. At times, much of the free time was spent in the lounge/dining room playing board games – an excellent way of creating the right atmosphere for chatting and sharing some “deeper” things!

As for the golf, Tim Rott won the “RCNZ Pastors' Masters” and received a beautiful trophy. “The Cliffs” near Masterton attracted the fishermen among us. They were Dirk van Garderen, Paul Archbald, Daniel Wilson, and Peter Brain (our key-note speaker). The men caught 2 “keepers.” Dirk, who was fly-fishing, caught some more, but they were all tiddlers.

The two parties of bush-walkers that went on two different days to “Rivendell” (the site where certain scenes from the Lord of the Rings were shot) almost had more success than the fishermen.

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Both parties encountered "elf 14" from the Lord of the Rings movies. On both occasions, he was leading a guided tour. He even put his elf-ears on for the second party.

However, this was not all that happened in our time slot of relaxation. Part of our free time came in handy for some ministers who used the opportunity to do a bit of work for the **synodical committees** for which they have been appointed. The deputies to the RTC and the CRCA-synod (John Haverland & Michael Willemse) used the Friday-afternoon free time to give the rest of us a solid face-to-face update on their recent visit to Australia.

Our **Evening sessions** were filled by internal speakers

- On the Tuesday night, Alan Douma (very passionate about their missionary work in PNG) opened up for us again the importance of cross-cultural evangelism/ministry and some of the hardships & joys they are going through;
- On the Wednesday night, Tim Rott kept us captivated for more than an hour as he gave an engaging and insightful overview of his years of ministry as chaplain of the US marines on board the big US naval vessels. He shared, among other, also his pastoral experiences during the first Gulf War. His wife, Georgette, gave witness of the Lord's strength as He upheld her and the family during the long months of Tim's absence;
- On the Thursday night, Dirk van Garderen passionately shared some highlights from his 40 years in ministry. What an encouragement for those of us who have been in Christian ministry for only a short time! How daunting it must have been for Dirk & Gonnie when they started off in ministry – he only around 22yrs of age and Gonnie even younger. Yet, they were called to serve some real "stalwarts" of the Reformed Church in Adelaide. But what we learned with great joy from this couple is that the Lord always strengthens and equips those whom He has called!
- On the Friday night, we were visited by New Zealand representatives of Voice of the Martyrs. Among other, they showed us pictures of Christians who, about two years ago, were persecuted in the Orissa province in India. What an eye-opener to hear and see how these people do not necessarily ask for financial aid but for prayer – also: how *they* pray for God's *un*-persecuted church!

One evening (I forgot which one), after the speaker for the night had shared his message, we also watched the very gripping and uplifting **movie**, "Courageous," made by Sherwood Pictures (Albany, Georgia, USA), the same company that did "Flywheel," "Facing the Giants," and "Fireproof" – very good!

As I conclude, allow me a few **words of thanks** to all the congregations of the RCNZ who have allowed the space & time for us to meet together, to be spiritually and emotionally fed (of course, physically too – ☺). Also: a word of thanks especially to the Nugteren couple of Wellington who stood at the lead in organising this most beautiful conference. Through your kindness, as RCNZ congregations, and their organising efforts the Lord has again strengthened His servants in the RCNZ.

*Pieter van Huyssteen*

## Recommendations

1. *To provide for another Ministers & Wives' Conference in the next inter-Synodical period;*
2. *To appoint the South Island Presbytery ministers to organize the next Conference.*
3. *To request the South Island Presbytery to appoint a reporter of the conference.*