

faith in **focus**

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Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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**"...who formed the
mountains by your power..."**

Psalm 65:6a

CONTENTS

When brethren make it their delight <i>Synod 2002</i>	3
What a rich thing it is to be a Christian! — <i>A 'Clayton's' wedding</i>	5
Infant Baptism	6
Between Me & You — <i>Keep your fork!</i>	7
A Feminine Focus — <i>Knowing God</i>	8
Another follow my children <i>The third in the series on senior living options</i>	10
Worldview Conference — <i>A review</i>	11
Those Who God Foreknew <i>Samuel's story ends — and begins!</i>	12
World News	14
Church News — <i>Avondale, Wellington Ladies Presbyterial, Cadet & Calvinette Executive</i>	15
Mission in Focus <i>Prayer Points, Inner City Mission</i>	18

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Editorial

This issue has a number of reports of different meetings and conferences. They tell about times when we take a break from our everyday work and focus on something in particular - something that will help equip us even better in our everyday service to the Lord. I pray that as you read these various reports they will help you also in further service to the Lord.

But could I also add that our meeting together is what we need to do more often. Naturally, that should be every Sunday as we gather twice for public worship of the Lord. This is the primary and major motivator for our daily service to the Lord. Those who love the Lord know that. And those who falter in this will soon find themselves faltering the other six days. Together with this most vital of fellowship we have with the Lord and with each other, these other Christian meetings and conferences build upon that foundation of the Head of the Church.

Someone once quipped that a Committee is something which keeps Minutes but wastes hours! And we can see his point. We can become overly involved in those things which organise the work we do, and so be kept away from doing the work we should do. Sometimes it is hard to see how the Spirit moves through the levels of accountability that we have - and particularly so in the church. Yet doesn't that view occur when we have lost sight of whose Church and whose World it is in the first place? And especially doesn't that view come because the Bible's teaching on this, and upon so many other things, has become misunderstood or even omitted altogether?

In fact, isn't the reason why the 'western world' has the committees and councils and courts and parliaments it has because of its Christian background? Everything is done decently and in good order (cf. 1 Cor.14:33). When we work together His way there His blessing is.

"There can be no wisdom disjoined from goodness."

Richard C. Trench

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.

When brethren make it their delight

The churches meeting in Synod 2002

Sjirk Bajema

Our churches gathered together for the triennial Synod in the Reformed Church of Christchurch at 3pm on Saturday the 27th of April 2002. From all over New Zealand, and from Australia, and later South Africa, various delegates and observers joined for the week in which we consider what we share as a federation of churches in this country.

In this short, organisational, session, the various credentials were sighted and the moderamen elected - the Rev. Bill Wiersma as Moderator, the Rev. John Haverland as vice-moderator, the Rev. Bruce Hoyt as 1st Clerk, and Elder Walter Walraven as 2nd Clerk. This experienced and able team led us in an honouring and humorous way through the business before us.

That evening the Rev. Michael Flinn led the Prayer Service for Synod, preaching upon Psalm 133 and the call of unity it is for God's people.

Synod in song

On Monday morning the business before us was begun. But as with the beginning of every session there was scripture, prayer, and singing. And can Synod sing! Even the cooks had us singing a favourite psalm on one occasion. As one local member commented, having that many male voices together is a beautiful sound of its own.

There was not only union in our songs. There was a genuine working together throughout Synod. And a steep learning curve for some first-time delegates to Synod. We had with us the three North American ministers recently installed as ministers in our denomination, as well as four South African elders as delegates, and one alternative elder delegate. It was good to meet with them, and to realise the wide variety of backgrounds in our churches.

We could appreciate the blessings upon our churches since we last met in the regular Synod in October 1988. We have had a new church added, with Dovedale; a new church about to be added, with the preaching post at Hukanui, Hamilton; and the beginnings of new Home Mission work in Wanganui and Waikanae (near Wellington). Our Cadets and Calvinettes have also grown, with around a hundred more children and counsellors, together with five new Clubs, in the movement since last Synod.

And to help us sing more of the same songs together, Synod decided

to produce our own denominational hymnbook, using the material of the five books currently approved, together with the inclusion of updated liturgical forms and confessions. In the meantime, the other hymnbooks will continue to have accepted status in our churches, with the 1987 Psalter Hymnal continuing provisionally until next Synod.

Other churches

Synod spent much time considering our relations with other churches. And there were many! There was an Overture regarding our ties with like-minded churches in New Zealand, a subject given added weight with the presence and address of the Rev. James Cho, the minister of the Independent Korean Reformed Church in Auckland, a congregation of a small denomination in Korea. This resulted in encouragement to local churches to take up contact with these groups, and to use the Interchurch Relations Committee (I.R.C.), to develop these ties. The I.R.C. had an extensive report outlining our present contact with sister churches and others whom we might be considering in that light.

One of the Committee's recommendations was: *"To advise the CRCA (Christian Reformed Churches of Australia) that our sister-church relationship is again under strain because of the decision on Women as Deacons, Children at the Lord's Supper, and continued acceptance of worship innovations which are a departure from traditional Reformed practice."*

This elicited much response and interaction, particularly from the Australian delegates. They argued that the issue of Women in the office of Deacon was still subject to appeal and could be overturned (though the vote was 15-9 in favour). The recommendation was carried, and the IRC will be involved in a new round of raising concern with the CRCA before their Synod next year.

Our ongoing differences also reflect the different ways the CRCA and the RCNZ have developed ecumenically. The CRCA continue to be involved in the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), which has such theologically liberal churches as the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN) as full members (shown in even homosexuals and transsexuals being in office in the church), and also in a full sister church relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of North America, which our churches cut ties with in 1998.

We were blessed with the presence of three South African ministers, representing each of the major Reformed denominations in that country. These men are particularly entrusted with the matter of the many South Africans migrating to New Zealand, and ensuring that, as much as possible, they are able to fit into church life here. And also observing at our Synod, and providing valuable insights, particularly into a proposed OMB work, were two delegates from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

In relation to other denominations, it was decided to enter into a sister church relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, a sister church of the Free Church of Scotland, and a fellow member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (I.C.R.C.). The ICRC is a good meeting place for like-minded Reformed and Presbyterian churches, also in its Missions Conferences. Here our Rev. John Goris plays a part as the Missions Chairman for the ICRC.

Theological Education

Another key subject on Synod's floor was our relationship with the Reformed Theological College. Much discussion was held on this also, resulting in this decision of Synod:

"1. That in view of the stated position of two members of the faculty on prophecies and the WCF (Westminster Confession of Faith) 1.1 and 1.6 and the stated position of the RCNZ and the RTC on these matters that:

a) The RCNZ give notice of the





Some of the kitchen staff



Mrs Liana Havelaar, helping in the office



Fraternal delegates from FRCA and CRCA

dissolution of the contract between our churches and the ACTE (The Association for Christian Tertiary Education, which runs the College), to take effect at the next Synod, and instruct the deputies to draw up an agreement, in consultation with the ACTE/RTC, that allows for a working relationship between the RCNZ and the RTC. This agreement should be presented to the sessions one year before the next Synod for responses.

b) The Synod commended the RTC to the churches as a suitable college for our students."

Until next Synod, then, the same support and visitation by Deputies to the RTC continues, but this will be reviewed at the next Synod. It is deeply disappointing that the College faculty can no longer fully subscribe to our Confessional basis.

Meanwhile we dealt with a helpful report from the Theological Review Committee, which gave a run-down on what theological courses were available in New Zealand. The College most recommended as closest to us biblically and confessionally was Grace Theological College, in Manurewa, Auckland, though it only offers courses up to the equivalent of the two-year Diploma of Theology from the RTC.

In the long-term it was recognised that it would be desirable to have a theological seminary in New Zealand, but that was not seen as a short-term option.

Overseas Mission

An extensive report came to us from our Overseas Mission Board. This was supplemented by a late addendum in regards to developing a work in Papua New Guinea. One of the authors of this addendum, Professor Anton Meister, of the Palmerston North church, gave an informative presentation of a visit to this work that he had been able to conduct, together with Br Derek Cressy of the Masterton Church. This resulted in Synod deciding:

"That the Reformed Churches of New Zealand engage in mission work in co-operation with the Canadian Reformed Churches in Papua New Guinea, on the understanding that more detailed plans will be presented to the sessions for approval."

The radio ministry work of Sr Janice Reid continues to be supported, while her work in promoting a mission awareness through Faith in Focus was also appreciated.



After 'in camera' discussion and consideration it was decided not to support Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Ltd).

Other Reports

Synod was very appreciative of the on-going work done by Committees such as the National Diaconate Committee (who will also be organising a deacon's conference in the next year or so), the Educational Resource Committee (Lampstand), the National Publications Committee (which amongst other things produces Faith in Focus, and who in that



regard thanked the Rev. Gary Milne for his editing of our magazine over seven years), the Political Contacts Committee, the Emeritus Fund Committee (also the same brothers as the Long Service Leave Fund Committee). Helpful work was done by the Bioethics Study Committee, and the Discipline of Those Who Resign Study Committee. The latter's Report has given our Sessions some good guidelines to use in the situation of those unilaterally resigning from the church.

There were several hard working and long serving folk who had recently passed on to be with their Lord, whose families will be especially thanked - Mr Kamphuis (on the Emeritus Fund and Long Service Leave Fund Committees) and Mrs E. Bosgra (who produced our Yearbook for many years).

Then there is the work of our Synodical Archivist and Statistician, Br Roy Nugteren, and the Stated Clerk, the Rev. Bruce Hoyt, who were warmly commended for their work.

And as for what else happened at Synod - are they not written in the annals (Minutes) of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand? (Obtainable from our website, or your local delegate.)

Conclusion

This was a well-run and well-equipped Synod, and this Synod expressed this in its thanks to the Christchurch hosts. Great food, great company, and a delightful city.

The Cooks shared their humour with us by the presentation of the Four Synodical Awards - ranging from the Synodical Disobedience Award (for a delegate determined not to eat what his wife recommended), through to the Athletic Award for being first at every meal and break time. While an Aussie cleaned up the former the three others were definitely claimed by the North American contingent, thus leaving the Kiwis bereft yet again - but certainly not of a good laugh!

What a rich thing it is to be a Christian!

A 'Claytons' wedding

John Rogers

It was my duty to attend a wedding recently of a couple who are not professing believers. The whole show seemed to illustrate a lot of the confusion one gets into when one is exiting what was once a Christian culture with Christian institutions. It also illustrated the sheer muddle-headedness of many Christians when they try to be nice but are actually only inconsistent (a euphemism for unfaithful?).

A "nice" wedding

One of the couple being from a Christian family, they were married by a Christian. But it was a funny piece. The celebrant probably did the job almost as well as he could under the circumstances. But even given perhaps the pressure to perform it (being a close relative), I think I would have declined. Why does one who has rejected the Church want to marry under the Church's umbrella anyway? I was going to say "with the Church's blessing." But it was quite obvious that they didn't want that. The first thing I noticed when I was given an order of 'service' was that there were no hymns; and no sermon (or meditation or whatever other *nom de plume*). All that was Christian about the ceremony was two short prayers the celebrant managed to slip in. It was all just humanistic niceness.

The Church has always begun her marriage ceremonies with a reminder that we gather in the sight of God and that marriage is a gift of God from the dawn of history. But this time we were gathered under the bright blue sky, surrounded by a lovely garden and heard how these two had very good character traits that would make them good marriage partners. Oh well. After that there was a nice poem about love from one mother. (Forgive me for this continuous and incorrect use of the word nice, meaning something like: pleasant but harmless and probably rather meaningless as well. But it seems the most appropriate sentiment.) And then from the other mother Paul's love poem from 1 Corinthians 13. And that, in that setting, sounded, and is, as humanistic as the other.

Seeking God's nearness when they're so far

It all makes me ask a few questions (and we all find ourselves in these sorts of situations at times, so it won't hurt us to think about them): is it right to ask God's blessing on a couple who consciously reject Him? Most certainly "God makes his rain to fall and sun

to shine on the wicked as well as on the good." We can certainly be grateful for God's preserving grace in this world – that there are still good marriages among our pagan neighbours; that our society still hangs together and works. But surely it is something else to pray God's blessings on Christ-rejecters? Are we told to do that anywhere in Scripture?

Then I hear in the background, "But they both accepted the Lord into their hearts a few years ago." Leave aside the theology of that this time, but this was from people who know the couple has been what used to be called (in plainer days) living in sin for the last two years! And arose from it at 7am that Saturday morning! Into their hearts, huh. God doesn't seem to have been given much play in their hearts over the past two years! I made no comment. One mustn't be judgmental or spoil a nice day. (Or am I becoming too nice too? Did Paul say something somewhere about "in season and out of season"? I'll have to check that out again.)

While we're still thinking about the 'ceremony' (I'll explain the single quotes in a minute), there was this funny bit in the middle. We were asked: "and who gives this woman to this man?" and after that was answered, "who gives this man to this woman?" My goodness man, I thought, you're a bit late in the day asking about that! These two gave themselves to each other quite some time ago. Am I being harsh if ask if this is not a farce? Not getting married. I was very happy they were doing that. I would gladly have gone to the registry office with them for that and told them I'm glad you've done the right thing. But this ceremony? As if there were not this history behind it? There had been no repentance and separation for a time beforehand, you understand. Later in the evening, somebody commented that the couple didn't seem in a great hurry to get away. Well! No. Why should they be? They had no new roads to travel, no great adventures to launch out on, no new discoveries to make that night. Why should they be in a hurry? It would be all anticlimax.

What gives?

But apart from the farcical aspect, there is also in this bit about "who gives this woman?" "who gives this man?" a confusion about the relationship between the two in marriage. Genesis 2 says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother" That is what masculinity is. A boy grows up and becomes a man and leaves home (or at least, leaves his

parents as a child even if he may not have physically left their home) and finds his own place in the world (under God) and then takes a wife. Of course, he may well do that in conjunction with his parents' advice (we never cease needing advice), but he puts away childhood and becomes independent in the world. As I read Scripture the idea of the independent woman – at least, the young independent woman – is foreign to biblical culture except in the case of the widow, the divorcee and the likes of Zelophehad's daughters (Joshua 17; and that basic social structure did not seem to have any inhibiting effect on those women). The man asks his prospective father in law for his love's hand and she is given to him in marriage. In terms of their being, the two are, of course, equal but in relational terms they are not. He is the leader and she his counterpart, his follower in the dance of life. That he be given to her in the same terms as she to him implies two things. On the one hand it implies equality or sameness of role, which the Bible, and nature, nowhere allow. He has duties to her that she does not have to him, and vice versa. For this reason, the vows they make cannot be the same either. On the other hand, this equal giving away implies he is not, in fact, a man having attained his independence! In which case he is not ready for marriage! Oh dear, we are getting mixed up!

Their own thing

So the ceremony went on. With that note of trying to keep up the interest one hears at times in masters of ceremonies, we were then told that he and she had written their own vows. How creative! Our ears prick up to hear how these two (over against the last few weddings we went to) are going to express themselves. And if we can remember or care, we might have a little more fodder for the small talk at table later. (Is it only me that gets thoroughly bored by all this contrived creativeness?) But here is another confusion. More actually, another step in rebellion. We live in an age in which we are to imagine and so create our own reality. So, with our own vows we create our own marriage. At the end of the description of marriage in our blue PH, the couple are asked: "Having heard from the Word of God the teaching concerning marriage, do you assent thereto, and do you desire to enter into this holy estate as ordained by God?" A couple does not create their marriage. They enter it! It is an already existing institution! Of biblical origin, design, purpose

and shape. And so acknowledged throughout history the world over! Until today! The very age in which we are told we have become so grown up, we become most childish. Perpetual change, perpetual inventiveness, relentless throwing off of the old is a sure sign of immaturity which cannot leave well alone and rest in the old tried and true. As Bruce Logan reminded us recently in his [Real Issues](#), marriage is a pre-existing institution that is bigger than us. It is to shape us and we are to conform to it, not vice versa.

A ceremony?

I said earlier I would explain why I set the word ceremony within single quotes at one point above (and so used they should be single, not double as so often one sees today. One can only weep at the laziness and consequent proliferating ignorance.) The function we attended was called a marriage ceremony. What is a ceremony? My dictionary defines it as "a rite, a formal act, custom, convention ... pomp, formality, etc. – adj; relating to or of the nature of ceremony or a ceremony." As reformed people, we are a little dubious about rites and ceremony. We recognize them and have them. But don't overdo it! As colonials we're inclined to mock pomp and formality. But there is nothing so childish, Lewis reminds us, as one who insists on performing a formal act informally, with its attendant patter, what has been well called the night-club format. Grrr! Thankfully, this show was not so bad in that respect.

But there we were, standing out in the hot early autumn sun at 2.30 in the afternoon waiting for it to start, some pretty old people included, when we are told over the obligatory speaker system that, of course, did not work properly (does technology ever fail to spoil a ceremony?), "Sorry folks. No, it's not the bride who is late. Somebody forgot the CD for the

entrance music." So we wait on. My half bald pate continuing to drink in those dangerous melanoma producing rays (if that is not also cadswallop). Finally the little plastic disc arrives. I wait with bated breath for this "entrance music". Talk about anti-climax. What do we hear? By cupping my ear I managed to hear some female voice singing a love-song in that toneless, half-talking style that seems to have gained some popularity lately. I make no criticism of the song according to its genre. But it was just plain wrong!! out of place, inappropriate, informal, unceremonial and plain poor – even to this ex-Plymouth Brethren, dissenter of dissenters, anti-ritualist of the anti-ritualists. I could not help recalling the latest wedding we had. We hired an old brick Presbyterian Church in Devonport and I walked our daughter in to the dignified strains of Pachelbel's canon on a pipe organ with our son accompanying it on trumpet. And on the previous occasion to Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary (or some such). Not quite Westminster Abbey but we're not royalty either! An attempt at Westminster Abbey would have been silly, merely pretentious. One must remember who one is in this world.

And after

Afterwards we had the reception. A good enough meal with beautiful sea views. Then there are the speeches. Of course, we are all more or less good at that business so I will make no comment on them. My point is not to criticize persons. They weren't great but the whole four of them, taking no more than ten minutes, was the whole show. Again, I couldn't help but think of past weddings in our family or many other Christian weddings I have attended. And Church social evenings. Hey people, do we realise how rich we are? We know how to put on a show! We know how to do what the world has forgotten with all its mere

entertainment to sap its life and ability! We still know how to have fun! With our skits and musical items we still have true creativity!

The last important thing

There was one other very important thing. One other chap said to me, "You know what's wrong here John? There are times when you just want to give thanks, when it seems to spring up within you naturally – like at a wedding. But that is stifled when you leave God out. And that's what's missing here. That's why this thing feels so empty." I had thought the same thing. There was a studied refusal to acknowledge God. The consequence is a careful suppression of thankfulness. When men "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18), they also suppress thankfulness in unrighteousness so that "their foolish hearts are darkened" (Romans 1:21). We want to give expression to that joy and thankfulness we feel. We are designed to give praise and especially at the high points in our lives there is an impulse to lift our hearts to God in a rousing hymn or psalm of praise or prayer. But when that opportunity is removed, we feel cheated. And we are cheated! And the result is we become half-men, hollow men, poorer in every way, capable only of passing pleasure, mere hedonism and laughter. But all great true pleasures are also crowned with a shout of joy and thankfulness to God.

The afternoon and evening were not only theologically muddle-headed; they were, in terms of common culture (which, perhaps, in a way is real culture, that which we cultivate), just plain poor. I think I'll stay a Christian. Life is so much broader and richer, happy and joyful, in every way. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107) It would do them the world of good!

Infant baptism

Cor Feyter

It was a beautiful church service. The Grey baby (I mean the baby of the family Grey) was baptised. The Greys are an exemplary family—faithful, devout, outgoing, reliable, disciplined; a lovely, popular family. When they gathered around the baptismal font, their older children observed the proceedings with wide-eyed wonder. And when the baby felt the water on its forehead, it made, as if on cue, a few plaintive but discrete crying noises, which brought the inevitable smiles to the faces of the church members. A lovely family, a beautiful service. No wonder that when the minister asked the question, 'Do you, the people of the

Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for it, help care for its instruction in the faith and encourage and sustain it in the fellowship of believers?', the congregation responded with a hearty, 'We do, God helping us'.

Unlike a few weeks earlier, when the Brown baby was baptised. The Browns live some distance from the church and cannot attend all services, nor take part in other church activities. Consequently, they are not well known in the congregation. The church members appeared to be decidedly less enthusiastic about welcoming the baby Brown into the congregation than they were about the baby Grey. Me? I didn't say anything. Not in the case of the baby Brown, and not in the

case of the baby Grey either. Because it isn't for me to say! I do not believe that members of the congregation have a choice in this matter and to imply that they have, by asking them the question quoted in the previous paragraph, is meaningless. More importantly, however, I believe that it is inconsistent with our beliefs about the meaning of baptism, including infant baptism. To explain what I mean, let's have a look at what we believe.

What we believe

Three of our confessions of faith refer to the sacrament of baptism in various ways (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 26 & 27; Belgic Confession, art 34; Westminster Confession,

chapter 28). A summary of our beliefs is read out at every baptism. We have heard it so often, haven't we? And isn't it fair to say that because we have heard it so often, the attention of the congregation tends to get focused on the baby and its family (like in the case of the baby Grey), rather than on the mighty acts of our Lord, of which baptism is a sign and seal? A sign because the water used signifies a washing, a cleansing from our sinful natural state; and a seal because it is a small, in itself insignificant, visible token of the invisible mighty forgiveness and promises of our Lord.

When a person comes to acknowledge and accept the Lord as his/her saviour, then that person ought to be baptised to carry the Lord's seal that he or she belongs to Him. And when a baby is born into a Christian family, then the Lord promises to extend His love and grace also to that baby, so it is baptised as well. The action in this is 100% from the Lord to us. We ourselves add nothing to it, nor do we have any say in it. A child of believing parents is part of God's family, it does belong with 'the people of God', which in practice means that it is part of the local congregation. It is therefore automatically entitled to be received in love, prayed for, supported, instructed, encouraged and sustained, whether individual members of congregations like it or not.

Congregational Approbation?

To ask the congregation whether they promise to do so suggests that the outpourings of God's grace and blessings are subject to the congregation's acceptance of the child. But they are not subject to anything or to anyone. God Himself, and He only, decides on whom He will have mercy and on whom He will have compassion (Rom 9:15). A striking example of that is found a few verses earlier in the same chapter, where it is told that even before Rebekah's twin children were born, before either of them had a chance to do anything, either good or bad, she was told that the older would serve the younger. God loved Jacob, but hated Esau. By human standards that would be grossly unfair, but who are we to decide what's fair and what's unfair when it comes to God's mercy. Indeed, let's be very, very grateful that our Lord's actions are not dependent on anyone's acceptance, nor on any human rules, customs or standards, so we should avoid anything that may suggest otherwise.

I'm not quite sure how the practice of asking the question got into our churches. As far as I can make out it was simply in a new hymn book version, when that was introduced. Let's stop using it! On the other hand, I do believe that it wouldn't hurt if congregations were now and again reminded of their responsibilities towards each other, and particularly to the younger members. So why not charge them, similar to the way congregations are charged when office bearers are ordained? It would go something like this: 'I charge you, the people of the Lord,

to receive this child in love, pray for it, help care for its instruction in the faith and encourage and sustain it in the fellowship of believers'. Now, how is that for a suggestion?

(Cor Feyter is presently the Stated Clerk of the Auckland Presbytery and has served in the office of elder in the Hamilton congregation.)

Between You and Me!

Keep your fork—the best is yet to come...

Dick G. Vanderpyl

There was a young woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she was getting her things "in order," she contacted her pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in.

Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

"There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the pastor's reply. "This is very important," the young woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The pastor stood looking at the young woman, not knowing quite what to say.

"That surprises you, doesn't it?" the young woman asked.

"Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request," said the pastor. The young woman explained. "My grandmother once told me this story, and from there on out, I have always done so. I have also, always tried to pass along its message to those I love and those who are in need of encouragement. 'In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork.' It was my favourite part, because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance! So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?'

Then I want you to tell them, 'Keep your fork ... the best is yet to come.'"

The pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young woman goodbye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the young woman had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than many people twice her age, with twice as much experience and knowledge. She KNEW that something better was coming.

At the funeral people were walking by the young woman's casket, and they saw the pretty dress she was wearing and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the pastor heard the question, "What's with the fork?" And over and over he smiled. During his message, the pastor told the people of the conversation he had with the young woman shortly before she died.

He told them about the fork, and about what it symbolised to her.

The pastor told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork, and told them that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it either.

He was right. So the next time you reach down for your fork, let it remind you ever so gently, that the best is yet to come. Friends are a very rare jewel, indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. They lend an ear, they share a word of praise, and they always want to open their hearts to us. Show your friends how much you care. Remember to always be there for them, even when you need them more. For you never know when it may be their time to "Keep your fork." Cherish the time you have, and the memories you share... being friends with someone is not an opportunity, but a sweet responsibility.

Send this to everyone you consider a FRIEND even if it means sending back to the person who sent it to you. And keep your fork.

A feminine focus

The tried and true

Sally Davey

Sometimes there are books that leave their mark on our lives. Not because they are racy and exciting reads, or because they are so moving that they bring us to tears. No, I mean the kind of book that leaves us wiser, more deeply certain of what we believe, even if it may not stand out on its own in our memory. This kind of book usually deals with the central truths of the faith—and because of that, is probably one of the many building blocks in the growth of our knowledge of God. Such books are dearer to me than any startling analysis of the latest trend in church life. This is the kind of book that has given me spiritual life, that has brought me up in Christ, and that will be with me when the most difficult hours of my life come. It is the kind of book that one wants to give to beginners in Christ, to those in distress, and to any who want to serve Christ with all their hearts. It is the kind of book that will last because it teaches

what is lasting, and does it well.

J.I. Packer's *Knowing God* is such a book; and it will be known to many of you who read this, with good reason. But another generation has grown up since the 1970s and 80s, and I want to introduce Packer and his book again, for this generation. *Knowing God* is not just another book of its time, for its time, and now past its time. It is one of the classics, and I pray that its work will continue on to bear good fruit in the lives of many.

Packer's character

What kind of person writes such a book? I suppose it is true that through the centuries, God has given the necessary gifts to people of all kinds of character and background. After all, the Bible was written by all manner of people—men brought up in royal courts, simple fishermen, and Jewish rabbis. In our day, helpful books on the Christian life are written by many men and women in many different countries. But *Knowing God* is the sort of book that takes special theological understanding. It is not the sort of book that could be written by someone without deep understanding of the Scriptures; and even an academic training at that. But that is not the only kind of writing gift required. *Knowing God* had to be written by a man who understands how everyday men and women think—the kinds of questions we have, the kinds of personal struggles which perplex us, and the needs we all have for a deeper knowledge of God in our lives. Packer is an academic, but he is an intensely human one!

I well remember my only first-hand glimpse of the man, back in my student days in Philadelphia. He was speaking at a conference on Reformed theology. There stood a tall, thin, gangly, very English-looking

man in his fifties—somewhat like an absent-minded professor. But his mind was

acute, as was his understanding of what application of truth would most help his audience. And he had a sense of humour—he told us that his wife once chided him: "I married *you*, not your ministry!" I suspected that here was a shy, scholarly man whose love of teaching others had drawn out of him the very best that God had given him. This immediately drew me to him as a person. It was not long afterwards that I read *Knowing God*.

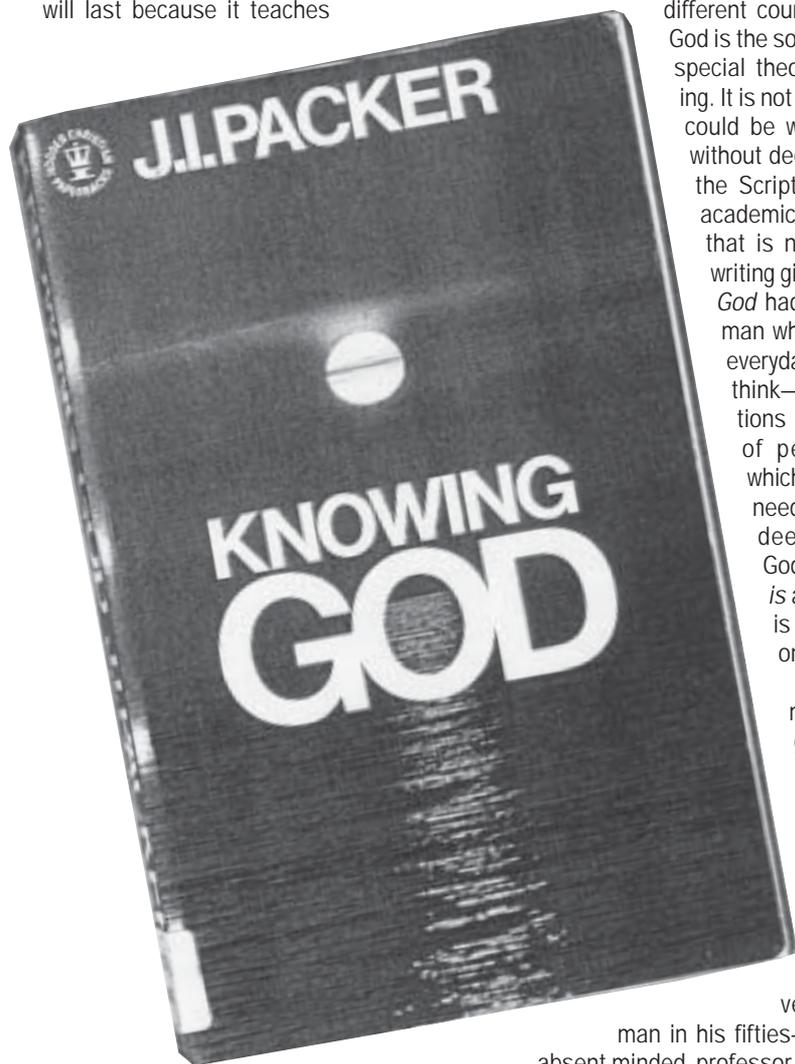
Packer's background

James Innell Packer grew up in Gloucester, England, the only son of a railway company clerk. An accident at the age of seven left him unable to play much in the way of sports, and his parents gave him a typewriter to occupy his time while he recovered. This led him to experiment with writing short stories. He was also a gifted pupil, excelling in the classics—which no doubt contributed, by way of background, to his superb ability to write gracefully and clearly. During his school years he began to wonder about religious truth—many around him, both teachers and fellow students, had doubts—but after reading the writings of C.S. Lewis (hot off the press at that time), his convictions about the truth of Christianity grew more certain. It was through the ministry of the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union that the young Packer was converted. During a sermon in which the preacher explained how he had come to realise he was not a Christian, and had a need of Christ, Packer realised with a sense of shock that he, too, though brought up and confirmed in the Anglican Church, was *not* a Christian. That same night he committed his life to Christ.

From that time, Packer began to point his studies in the theological direction. He went on to discover the Puritans, and later, through involvement with the circle around Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, wrote much about the value of learning spiritual lessons from their writings. In many ways, Packer was to become a theologian who taught through the lens of church history. He was a warm and infectious imparter of theological understanding; and much of what he wrote was to impress on men and women that growth in Christian graces can only happen through deeper *understanding* of God and his ways. All of his best-known books are written for the ordinary person, and with charm, tact and insight.

'Knowing God'

Knowing God originated as a series of articles in the *Evangelical Magazine*, a periodical that dealt with matters of general



interest for Christians who were serious about wanting to grow in their faith. His brief was to write something about God for people who were "fed up" with slippery, unclear theological language and who were willing to do some "honest and serious thinking." The articles Packer wrote were based one upon the other—each was a self-contained argument, but they were linked together like a chain. Some time later, and at the urging of Hodder and Stoughton's religious editor in 1972, the articles were modified and put together in book form. When the book came out in paperback, then was later brought out by Inter-Varsity in North America, it became hugely popular. By 1992 over a million copies had been sold.

Its popularity amazed its author, and not a few others. As Packer's biographer, Alister McGrath, has noted, "*it makes considerable demands of its readers, and is not an easy book to read.*" (p.191) This is noteworthy in an age when the evangelical world is not noted for its willingness to tackle solid theological truth. How did it happen? Some have thought Packer's clear style of writing was critical. Others found that the truths of which he was writing powerfully moved their hearts. John Stott, another well-known Anglican pastor and writer, found his attempts to read *Knowing God* frustrated by the need, constantly, to put the book down and "*turn aside to worship and to pray.*" Recommended and passed on from friend to friend, the book continues to impress and to inspire, thirty years after its first publication.

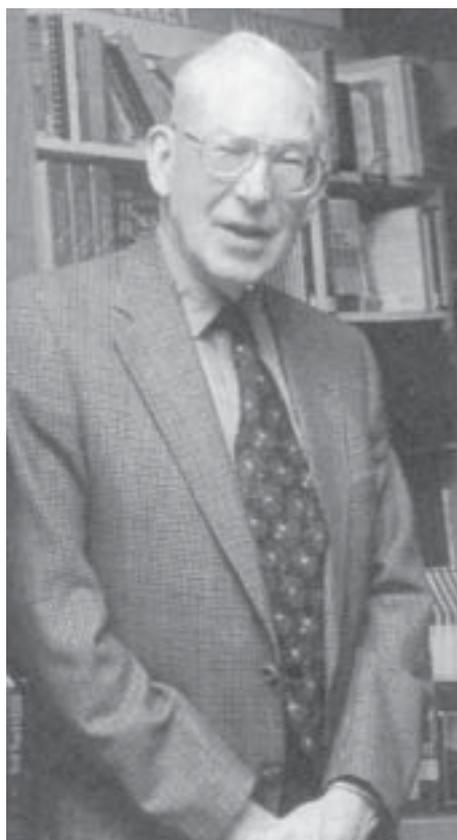
The structure to the book

Packer has divided his chapters into three sections. The first deals with the subject of the *study* of God. In this section, he warmly persuades the reader to treat this study as vitally important, and intensely practical. Here is what he says:

"Why need anyone take time off today for the kind of study you propose? Surely a layman, at any rate, can get on without it?...A fair question!—but there is, I think, a convincing answer to it. The questioner clearly assumes that a study of the nature and character of God will be unpractical and irrelevant for life. In fact, however, it is the most practical project anyone can engage in. Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, and put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfold, as it were, with

no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul." (pp. 14-15)

But we must study with the right *motives*. We need, Packer reminds us, to ask, "*What do I intend to do with my knowledge about God, once I have got it? For the fact that we have to face is this: that if we pursue theological knowledge for its own sake, it is bound to go bad on us. It will make us proud and conceited... For, as Paul told the conceited Corinthians, 'knowledge puffeth up...' (1 Cor.8:1)... To be preoccupied with getting theological knowledge as an end in itself, to approach Bible study with no higher a motive*



J.I. Packer, 1993

than a desire to know all the answers, is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied self-deception. We need to guard our hearts against such an attitude, and pray to be kept from it. As we saw earlier, there can be no spiritual health without doctrinal knowledge; but it is equally true that there can be no spiritual health with it, if it is sought for the wrong purpose and valued by the wrong standard. In this way, doctrinal study really can become a danger to spiritual life, and we today, no less than the Corinthians of old, need to be on our guard here."

A glimpse of God

The second section of the book shows us God. It gives us a glimpse—yes, only a glimpse, because this is an infinite subject—of Who God

is, and what He is like. He deals with God's unchangeableness, His majesty, His wisdom, His truth, His love, His justice, wrath, and jealousy. With clarity, Packer shows how the Scriptures speak of each of these qualities of God, and with realistic and helpful illustrations from history and from everyday life, he shows how these qualities make a difference to the way we should understand God's workings in the world. He constantly returns to the question: if God is like this, and we are made to bear His image, why do we fall so far short of these qualities ourselves? His chapters abound with pointed, personal application – and each chapter ends with a direct appeal to examine our hearts. Chapter 12, on "The Love of God" ends thus:

"Is it true that God is love to me as a Christian? And does the love of God mean all that has been said? If so, certain questions arise.

Why do I ever grumble and show discontent and resentment at the circumstances in which God has placed me?

Why am I ever distrustful, fearful, or depressed?

Why do I ever allow myself to grow cool, formal, and half-hearted in the service of the God who loves me so?...

Meditate upon these things. Examine yourself"(p. 115)

So what?

The third and final section of the book asks the "so what?" question. If these things about God are true, what does that mean He has done for us, and continues to do for us? This section deals with the truth about our salvation, and the way in which this God, holy and jealous, loved us and gave His only Son for us. It teaches us what life lived as a son of God should truly mean; it deals with the subject of God's guidance; and with the ways God helps us through those darker trials we all experience in life. The final chapter, "*The Adequacy of God*", pleads with us to find God, and all He so supremely is—our complete source of all strength, comfort, wisdom and hope. This, after all, is the chief end of man. And, on a characteristically simple yet profound note, Packer ends the book by urging us all not to be distracted from "*what was, is, and always will be the true priority for every human being—that is, learning to know God in Christ. 'Thou hast said, 'Seek ye my face.' My heart says to Thee, 'Thy face, Lord, do I seek'"* (Psalm 27:8, RSV). If this book moves any of its readers to identify more closely with the psalmist at this point, it will not have been written in vain."

I wholeheartedly agree.

Another 'follow my children'

Part of our series on senior living options

Marietje and Arie arrived in New Zealand with a family of five. Although all five were well past the baby age which then gave Wainuiomata the nick-name of 'Nappy Valley', they were happy to settle there, and enjoy the fellowship at the church.

But families grow up, and fathers retire. By the time of Arie's retirement, the five sons and daughters had gone away, and Marietje's older sister, also in Wainuiomata, had died. No children, the only couple of their age left in the church, decision time! It was a hard decision to make, especially for Arie, but as four of their children were living in or near Palmerston North, this seemed the logical place to go.

Being a builder, Arie knew what to watch out for. They found a lovely house suitable for the two of them on the main road to Napier, just a few kilometres from the big city and near the satellite village of Ashhurst. This was just right. Their two daughters lived only a few minutes away by car, and two sons were also quite near. Arie and Marietje put their Wainuiomata house on the market, made the bold move into their Ashhurst find, did a few alterations, added a feature door from Singapore, and attached a conservatory. They set up all Marietje's little knick-knacks, and

settled into their new life, renewing acquaintance at church with quite a few other folk who had already come to Palmerston North from Wellington.

Arie became ill not long afterwards, so he enjoyed the change for only three years. Marietje, left alone (but with her Lord, never alone) has stayed in the house. This may seem surprising, for it was one of her sons who developed the first retirement village in the city. Why did she not move into that village, where she would have emergency and medical help at the push of a button, a gardener to care for the grounds, and meals, at little extra cost, available if desired? Rather odd, don't you think?

With a smile, Marietje said she would have "no courage" to make the change. (Do you believe that?)

Of greater importance was the fact that the retirement village was on the far side of Palmerston North from Ashhurst. "My children pop in for half an hour, or even perhaps only for ten minutes for a cup of tea. They could not do that if I were sixteen or seventeen miles away. I would not see them nearly as often, nor the grandchildren, for they would have to make a special trip." Marietje, who recently

celebrated her eighty-seventh birthday, also now has the joy of great-grandchildren not far from her.

"Where I am is a central position. Someone can take me to church or into town in the morning to go shopping or visiting. I can catch a bus back, and the bus drivers drop me off right at the gate. They get out of the bus, help me out, set up my walking stroller, and wave good-bye."

Although often suffering from back pain, Marietje is cheerful and contented. From her lounge she can watch her canaries in the aviary, and see the busy road—there is always something of interest. She also has the security of a trustworthy lodger who has lived for about eight years in the small, self-contained unit behind the main house. To use her favourite word—marvellous!

Marietje spoke very appreciatively of another church member a few doors away who does a little shopping for her, takes her into town frequently, and is on the roster (with his own daughter and Marietje's family) for taking her to church. He also takes her to Bible study if she wants to go in the evening, and Marietje is frequently hostess to a weekly morning Bible study in her own home. Why should she move?

If you asked me for one word to describe Marietje, I would say, 'serenity'.

One of her daughters has said that as soon as her mother feels she cannot cope any more, she can go to live with this daughter. Anytime. Meantime, she will stay where she is as long as she is able. When talking of the future, though, Marietje herself did not mention this offer. I suspect she prefers not to anticipate the possibility. She loves her own home and her independence.

Nor should we underestimate the faith of a lifetime. When asked what she would do if she ever becomes so handicapped that she can no longer look after herself, this faith shone through. "I don't think about that. I live for the day and by the day. I'll worry about it when the time comes."

We talked about the Lord's exhortation in Matt. 6:34 (N.I.V.): "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself." Marietje's aim is to live happily in the now.

She mentioned a letter she had recently received from Holland concerning the events of September 11th, in which the writer commented, "Everyone in Holland is afraid—only those who *believe* are not afraid." And Marietje agrees. This bright little person, a breath of fresh air, has been through her troubles and hardship. She looks to the One Who upholds her. Yes, everything is *marvellous*.



The Worldview Conference

April 7 - 12, 2002

Anna Bartlett

I would like to report on the recent Worldview conference that took place at Willow Park Convention Centre, Bucklands Beach, Auckland. Approximately 120 people attended the conference during each day, and an extra 30 attended the evening lectures. The main speakers of this conference were David Noebel and Chuck Edwards, both from Summit Ministries in Colorado.

Their deliveries focussed on defining, comparing, and elaborating on different worldviews. The three main worldviews we studied were Secular Humanism, Marxist/Leninism, and Biblical Christianity. We also examined the New Age Movement, Postmodernity and Islam. Guest speakers zoomed in on particular disciplines such as creation, politics and economics.

What is a worldview?

But some might still be wondering, what exactly is a worldview? Dr. Noebel defines a worldview as any set of ideas that includes the ten disciplines (theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, politics, economics, law, and history). All worldviews are religious, because all worldviews have something to say about God (theology). Next time a Secular Humanist tells you he is not religious, try asking him for his beliefs regarding God and salvation. You will receive a religious answer. The Christian worldview is found of course in the Bible, which instructs us on all ten disciplines included in a worldview. (Our worldview gives us the big picture: the ten disciplines make up the pieces of the puzzle.)

Chuck Edwards gave a lecture showing how to rebut some of the common statements regarding truth and morals. For example, one often hears the statement, 'That may be true for you, but not for me.' In other words, there is no absolute truth. Dr. Edwards showed this statement to be absurd, for if it is true that there is no absolute truth, that is an absolute statement and therefore must be false!

Another common idiom people refer to states, 'You shouldn't force your morality on others.' This is a very difficult principle to live by consistently. You could demonstrate this by taking the portable CD player of the person who claims this. He might get a bit upset about this and inform you of your wrongdoing. Then you can point out he is enforcing his morality that says stealing is wrong onto you. Then give the CD player back!

A debate

On Tuesday, we had the opportunity to hear

a debate entitled, 'Abortion Should Be Legal.' Those on the affirmative were Dr. Zoe During and Dr. Bill Cooke. Until last year, Mrs During was president of the Auckland Branch of the Abortion Law Reform Association. Dr Cooke is a former president of the NZ Association of Rationalists & Humanists.

Those on the opposing side were Chuck Edwards and Matt Flannagan. Mr Edwards is an experienced debater and frequent guest speaker to address religious groups, and has



David Noebel

a ministry particularly towards teenagers. Matthew Flannagan is currently studying at the Bible College of New Zealand in Henderson. He, along with his wife, is actively involved with SPUC's youth wing.

It proved to be a very interesting debate, although those on the affirmative failed to rebut the opposition's main point. Chuck Edwards maintained that unless we can be certain an unborn child is not a human being, we ought to give it the benefit of the doubt. Dr. Cooke argued that abortion minimised suffering. At one point, Dr. During excused abortion by saying that nature has always ensured that life continues by producing an overabundance of life (think survival of the fittest). It was helpful to hear actual humanists state their position on abortion.

Local speakers

Our local speakers did us proud in each of their excellent deliveries. Every lecture gave well-articulated, informative and compelling reasons for Christians to be involved in every

discipline of the Biblical worldview.

On Thursday evening, Graham Capill presented us with five reasons why Christians must be involved in politics. It is common to hear Christians today giving reasons why we should not be. They say that Jesus, our role model, resisted politics, and politics is such a dirty business these days you cannot avoid compromising your faith. Rev. Capill suggested these are flawed arguments, and gave reasons why.

Firstly, God initiated the institution of government. Read Romans 13:1-4 if you are not convinced. It is not a secular institution, but as sacred as the church.

Secondly, the Bible commands God's people to be involved in the world. Rev. Capill likened our attitude to the world to that of money. Money is not inherently evil, yet the love of money is.

The world was created good, yet the love of the world is forbidden (1 John 2:15, 16).

Thirdly, the work of the government complements the work of the church. 1 Timothy 2:1,2 shows us that when the church prays for and gets behind the government, the government allows people to live a tranquil and quiet life. Rev. Capill tied in the next two verses to show that when the church supports the government, people come to a knowledge of God as a result.

Fourthly, when we have a government that respects God, it fulfils the wishes of the populace. The average Kiwi yearns for a godly government: one with limited authority, justice, peace, security, mercy, compassion and honesty.

Finally, a Christian government provides a godly inheritance for our children and grandchildren.

The conclusion

Craig Smith concluded the lectures with four challenges to each of us. He asked us to preserve what we learnt at this conference, and to make a permanent change in our life as a result. He asked us to go home and encourage our churches to open their eyes to what is going on around us. He challenged us to seek out friends, neighbours and relatives to present the Biblical worldview to. To do this, we need to be prepared with a storehouse of Scripture verses in our head. Finding a Christian news commentary such as *World* or the *Chalcedon Report* would aid us in this also. Finally, he challenged us to get involved in the public arena. In New Zealand, we have a unique opportunity to influence the government. Because of our small population, it is possible to make appointments with our local MP. Mr.

Smith testified to the power a letter to the editor can have. Remember that newspapers are crying out for letters, and even local newspapers have a circulation to thousands of homes. We should take advantage of this freedom of speech we have, before it is taken

away from us.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the organisers and the speakers for all their hard work. I have heard many positive reports from the conference, ranging from mind-blowing to sobering, and the standing ovation the

organisers received on the final day was well deserved.

(Anna Bartlett is a trainee teacher at the (Christian) Master's Institute, Auckland, and a member of the Mangere Reformed Church)

Those who God foreknew ... He also glorified

The last part – but it's not the end!

John Steenhof

One young person from the Silverstream Community New World noticed there were many elderly people in our church. Though it might be taken as a criticism, I take it as a compliment. The covenantal community is probably one of the very few today that mixes the old and the young people. And it is one of the few that takes care of its older people to the end. If you walk around Silverstream, there are plenty of elderly people around who are completely disengaged from society, and all they do now is simply exist - largely by themselves. Sad indeed! Very little of their old connections remain, unless they have a particularly close family. Loneliness, sadness, and a feeling of uselessness! Samuel was one of those countless disconnected old people. But God had plans for him.

Romans 8 held great comfort for Samuel. It speaks of God's initiating love. "Whom God **foreknew**..." - does that sound like love? When taken in a Greek sense of gnosis, or Western intellectual sense of knowledge, it can summon a vision of icicles like a cold rational knowledge. That would have meant nothing to Samuel. Such a knowledge would be like the icy North Wind in the story where Mr. North Wind competes with Mr. Sun in an attempt to make him remove his coat. Mr. North Wind (should be South here) blows his cold air upon a fellow, to try to **force** him, unsuccessfully take his coat off. No this is not the cold North Wind "know". Rather it is the intimate knowledge of a loving heavenly Father. A warm "marriage-type" knowledge representing intimate acquaintance, which involves warm love. "And Adam **knew** Eve and they conceived..." This is the inviting personal warmth of Mr. Sun, who shone on the same man, whereupon he voluntarily removed his coat, in order to experience the inviting rays.

The love of Christ

And yes, God completely knows us as human beings. In his love He loved us long ago. And in that same love, He places us in a

church with warm caring, loving people, representing the love of Christ. There is colour, there is coziness, there is friendship. God does not treat us as noumenal disembodied spirits. He foreloved us. A part of that love is shown when He places us in a loving covenantal body. This was the kind of loving surroundings Samuel needed. We spoke of the love the James family, the Vaatras and the Landkroons. This supplemented the warm caring love of many other members in the church. But we must not neglect to mention the love of the van der Werff family. Bart and Hetty had Samuel



Samuel Alexander

at their house almost every week.

Allow me to describe this family, to demonstrate the point. Bart and Hetty live on a property at the end of Johnsons road in the scenic Whitemans Valley on a property adjacent to Bart's brother Egbert and his wife Janny. Bart does not live in a flash house, but it is warm and gezellig. (That's about the limit of my

Dutch.) When we visit for coffee, we always come back feeling warm and fulfilled. Their families are genteel, friendly and happy. This kind of spirit makes their houses truly into homes.

This is "God's country" in that the scenery is breathtaking. The two houses are nestled in a back drop of gold and green hills, dressed in different olive patches of foliage. The drive which cuts in front of Bart's house at the front curves in a wide swath, to Egbert and Janny's upper property behind their fish ponds.

The Van Der Werffs always have a variety of projects going on. It is never boring. There are two fish ponds containing a special kind of weed eating fish which can clear up weeds from lakes. There are two huge circular tanks to raise frogs. There has been the venture of the worms fattened up by varying decayed matter. (This gives "diet of worms" a new meaning). There are Pine Trees for future timber in the hills. The cultivation of flower bulbs is one of the recent little undertakings. Sheep and cows dot the hills. Life is never dull around these two homesteads.

Every Monday, after Bart had finished his school run, Samuel would be waiting patiently in front of the school, to accompany Bart home. He was there so regularly, that he became known as "Bart's co-driver". There are some things you could count on, for a Monday. The sun would rise, the traffic would flow, the trees would grow, and Samuel would be standing there. They would first zap in the bus to the bread factory where they would obtain up to 600 loaves of bread, to be fed to the fish. After the scenic ride over the curvy Whitemans Road - a worthwhile trip in itself for a Scotsman of the hills - they would arrive at Bart's home and drop off the loaves, to the delight of the fish (Fish and loaves). Samuel always was thankful to settle down to his own "meal" in the form of steaming cup of coffee with an accompanying tart. Bart would leave him in the chair with plenty of reading beside him. His favourite reading was the Creation Science magazines. They would eat lunch together later, enjoying not only the food, but the warm fellowship. You

would often hear witty and comical comments of Samuel, followed by Bart's hearty laugh. Samuel always called Hetty "the boss", just in a friendly, jovial manner, but never having any message that she was the head of the house. It was just a friendly term of endearment.

He sometimes gave a hand with jobs on the premises. For instance, once when they emptied the pond, Samuel helped to count the fish as they were carried up in buckets. He faithfully and unceremoniously placed the numbers in Bart's good book. He always played the role of "inspector" to both Bart and Egbert, "checking" out how various jobs were going. With a twinkle in his eye, he would say, "I'm going up to check if Egbert is working." And in their usual way, Bart and Egbert would play the game well with Samuel. He never felt like he was being a burden to them. A miracle for an independent scotsman. He obviously delighted in his Mondays out.

When 2:30 rolled around, it was back on the bus with Bart to the school. He always left the bus with reluctance. But he could look forward to the next Monday, with the families he enjoyed so much.

The whole of life

So much of Samuel's spiritual growth took place in the ragtag run of family life on the farm and in the town of Silverstream. We as a church community were all thankful for Samuel, and Samuel was thankful for us. And we praised God that He could change sinful hearts, with His abiding love. We all had a chance that way. As I get older, I often think, "I hope that I can grow old with the grace, humour and sensitivity of Samuel." He was becoming like Christ!

Samuel came to the place where he desired to do Profession of Faith in front of the church. The big event happened in October of 99. What a day of rejoicing that was! We have a picture of him with Kai our Japanese student - who became a Christian as well.

Samuel now had a new sense of the eternal. He was building up an inheritance, which would last forever. He had a genuine sense of God's kingdom which would never pass away. So he was prepared for what would happen very soon. Very soon!

Declining physical health

One day, we came home to the news that Samuel was in the hospital. We heard that he had an infection of the foot for quite some time. But Samuel detested going to the doctor. He procrastinated until things got out of hand. He had gangrene! The news was sudden and shocking. The proposed medical solution was as well. His leg was in the end after a series of operations and tests, amputated above the knee. We were angry with ourselves that we had not pushed him to see the doctor!

But, even if we had, the chickens were also coming home to roost with respect to his smoking. His lungs were in sad condition, and

he had developed the dreaded disease - cancer! He was constantly wheezing as the strength was being sapped out of his body. All the pauses on the bridge and on the road anticipated this end which was not pleasant to think about for a friend.

But throughout his hospital stay the Lord gave him a strength which was enduring. He also maintained his concern for others. His Bible and reading material were always by his side. Our sons who visited him, felt a sense of being ministered to by Samuel. He loved others and he fellowshiped with them even in suffering. Even though he wasn't always very comfortable he always had time to talk about the lives of all those who entered his room.

But he had entered into the hospital on the 4th of December and never came out again! He came, and he stayed...for the rest of his life. In his last moments, it had been arranged that members of the church would be constantly beside him. He passed away in relative peace, on February 10, 2001 with members of his family at his side, as well as Jos Landkroon there.

As with most who leave this life there a sense of incompleteness. He had almost completed the Westminster Confession of Faith, but he missed out on the last three chapters. There were boxes of gems that he so carefully mulled over and written down. He had never really kept touch with his family. He had lost contact with his brother, who had passed away in 1999. While his 2 sisters who lived in Queensland had sent him parcels, and he often talked about them, they complained that he never wrote. His one sister, never married, passed away in 1998. Before he had gone to the hospital we were going to send him to Queensland as a surprise. But that too never eventuated. His relation with his spouse and daughter was never fleshed out, though in the end they stated that he was now a different man. Their presence at his bedside and at the funeral, were tokens of forgiveness.

We felt that we too had missed out on sharing in the new Samuel. And that seemed a pity. The children missed him sorely. Esther Landkroon said, "Mr. Alexander always gave us lollies. He always stopped at the school fence to have a rest from walking. And when he ran out of lollies he apologizes for not having them. I remember when he came over and had a cup of coffee with us"

I missed his sarcastic comments. His wonderful sense of humour. His critical comments about the speed which I rode on my bike down Sunbrae Road across the mouth of his street. The Landkroons missed the Bible studies and the shared times of fellowship and Boeterkoek. The van der Werffs missed him out on the farm. I dare say, there is a space in the hearts of our whole congregation.

The new life

How we felt about Samuel was all

summarised in an event on the day of his funeral. The hearse stopped in front of the church which is in direct sight of the Year 5 & 6 classroom. All the children were silently looking through the window, knowing full well that Samuel was being carried in a coffin in that car. They were puzzled when there was a knock on the door of the classroom. A person requested my help in carrying the coffin into the church. As I walked over, my thought dominated by the coffin, my imagination began to be stirred. What did Samuel look like inside? Was he now rejoicing in heaven at the throne of God? Wouldn't it be nice if he could be summoned from the dead? Didn't it seem unbelievable that he was alive just a few days ago, and now only his shell was here? Wasn't it sad that he was taken away from us so soon? And yet wasn't it great that he was now with the Lord? As I returned to the class, there was silence once again. One child lamented, "He was the only older person who would always talk with us!" Yes, we missed him.

I inherited his Bible and have made it my own study Bible. It always reminds me of his Berean fingers. I hope that my fingers are more Berean fingers. Often TV can be more compelling than a jaunt through the Bible.

But we all give thanks for Samuel, that we were able to witness the grace of God in bringing him back to Himself. The God who foreloved Samuel had taken him in His compassionate arms of love. And we were thankful that the lost sheep had been found.

The lessons we learned through God's work with Samuel

1. There is no stereotype of conversion.
2. Some people change quickly some slowly.
3. Some have attraction to one part of the gospel at first and some to another.
4. Evangelism must be word and deed.
5. Fellowship is an important part of the gospel.
6. The preaching of the word is an important part of evangelism.
7. There truly are five epistles. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and our lives. Many people never get to read the first four. But almost all people will read the fifth.
8. Things are not always what they seem. The most conservative families in doctrine showed the most love for Samuel, and had the most time for them. The idea of the die-hard conservative with no love, though it has some reality, is another stereotype which must go.
9. Officebearers who are the most busy, also

took the most time out for Samuel. The work of Officebearers is important in the work of evangelism. Observation: Effective men for evangelisation are often backed up by kind, bighearted, loving women of the Lord.

10. Friendship is very important in evangelism. Often evangelism programmes do not work because they miss the obvious factor of friendship.

11. Catechism is a beautiful summary of Biblical truth. Summaries of truth are precious, because they represent spiritual realities we can build upon. A "Berean spirit" does not consist of "always searching and never coming to the truth". Nor is it just stating only the general, "We accept the confessions in as far as they are Biblical" We must also rejoice in, and teach Biblical truth summarised in the confessions. This also applies to evangelism.

12. If you can't evangelise crowds, pray that the Lord will give you an individual with whom you can fellowship, and share your faith on a personal basis. We prayed this prayer, and God has answered a number of times.

13. Never give up on children, spouses, fathers, mothers, or grandmothers who have "left the faith". We often place a construction on people being "likely" or "unlikely" to come to the Lord. Samuel was one of a number of people who we considered "unlikely". But the Lord in His sovereign grace transcends the categories of man. Be careful not to hastily stop praying for somebody because you believe they have gone too far. As long as there is life there is hope.

14. Never let your expectations judge God's choices. After Samuel's conversion we expected many happy long years with him. But God in his grace decided differently. Who are

we to judge? In a fallen creation, expectations are often **seemingly** cruelly cut short. But God knows best. We just don't have enough information to finally judge. We are very little people.

15. Our families are our strength in the Reformed community. People love to enter warm family fellowship.

16. Our families can be our weakness in the Reformed community. Many are so busy inviting extended family, and friends, that the stranger is completely excluded.

17. Evangelism as a central part of the mandate that Christ has left us, ought to be an important part of our lives. Let us pray that we may be more consistent in our lives. For without evangelism we are deprived of the joy in fulfilment found in sharing our faith as Christ directed.

World news

Planned parenthood sued in St. Louis

A major class action lawsuit has been filed in the U.S. District Court in St. Louis, against the Planned Parenthood Federation of America

and Planned Parenthood of St. Louis. The suit alleges medical malpractice, wrongful death, civil rights violations, mass fraud, and genocide by specifically targeting minority women for abortions.

The lawsuit centres around two major allegations of systematic "mass fraud" and "genocide." The suit contends that Planned Parenthood has systematically committed fraud by failing to inform women or outright lying to them about the risks, both physical and emotional, associated with having an abortion. Further, the suit also claims that Planned Parenthood has, since the organisation's inception, been engaged in genocide through the systematic targeting of low income and minority women for abortions.

The suit reads, "Defendant has a long history, even dating back to its origin and founding, of intentionally targeting and encouraging lower income persons and those of minority races and ethnic groups, to have abortions, sterilization, and to use contraception, in order to lower the populations of said groups. Due to said efforts and intents of Defendant to lower the populations of lower income and minority groups, the populations of the African American, Hispanic, and American Indian peoples have declined sharply over the past three decades. Such acts on the part of Defendant reflect an intent on its part to commit genocide against Plaintiff and other African Americans, persons of lower socioeconomic status, and other minority groups, and to deprive them of their fundamental right to bear children, in violation of 42 USC =A71981."

+ ASSIST News Service (ANS) - PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126

Focus on the Family crosses the line in Canada

When *Focus on the Family* broadcast its program 'Homosexuality: Fact and Fiction' over an Alberta radio station, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) demanded a prime-time apology. According to CBSC chairman Ron Cohen, the Dobson program was homophobic and included gross generalisations about homosexuals.

Focus on the Family Canada president Darrel Reid said, "They're censoring one particular point of view and doing it under the guise of objective standards. But the process they apply is anything but objective."

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS



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

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

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

INTERESTED?

Then write to me -
Cr Betty-Ann Bajema, 17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe, Auckland

Focus on the Family learned of its predicament first through published reports, and only later from the Council.

+ World Evangelical Alliance Secretariat, PO Box WEF, Wheaton, IL 60189-8004

A report on Christians in the Middle East

Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo writes "Like other Bethlehem civilians, the Christians have been confined to their homes for days. They literally keep their heads down, not daring even to look out of the windows in case they are shot. They eat whatever they happen to have in the house. Water and electricity are now cut off in various areas. Some are injured, and some are mourning for relatives who have been killed.

" 'We are praying for you,' I said on the phone over and over again yesterday. 'Thank you so much, that is what we need,' the Christian leaders would reply.

"A few miles away, across the River Jordan, Christian refugees are pouring into Jordan from Iraq. As US and British leaders discuss overthrowing Saddam Hussein and attacking Iraq, many Muslims across the world consider it a new crusade against Islam. Iraqi Christians fear terrible repercussions for themselves ... Other Iraqis will assume that Christian Iraqis side with the enemy, the 'Christian' West. Across the Arab world, there is a growing resentment of Israel and the West. This is producing a groundswell of anti-Jewish, anti-Western, anti-Christian feelings, which bodes ill for beleaguered Christian minorities in the Arab world.

Most Christians in Bethlehem are now desperately poor, having lost their jobs in the tourist trade when the intifada began in September 2000. Iraqi Christians are also suffering terrible poverty, both in Iraq and in Jordan. The Barnabas Fund provides monthly gifts to enable the neediest Christian families to have food to survive. Gifts are channeled through local churches and Christian community groups to ensure that they reach those in greatest need."

+ Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director, Barnabas Fund, 4-4-2002; The Barnabas Fund, The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5DB, United Kingdom; phone 01672 564938; info@barnabasfund.org; www.barnabasfund.org.

RTS appoints Ric Cannada President

On April 4, the Reformed Theological Seminary Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Robert C. Cannada, Jr., as its third president. Cannada graduated from Vanderbilt in 1970, and received his Master of Divinity in 1973 and Doctor of Ministry in 1995, both from RTS.

In 1993, Cannada headed the establishment of an RTS campus in Charlotte. He served as its senior vice president until 1998, at which time he was appointed the Seminary's executive vice president and chief

operating officer. He will be dividing his time among RTS's three campuses and two extension schools.

+ Reformed Theological Seminary, 5422 Clinton Blvd. Jackson, MS 39209-3099 (601) 923-1600
rts.jackson@rts.edu

Tampa Rector renounces EC(USA) to join AMiA

The rector of a fast-growing parish in Tampa, Florida, involved in a bitter dispute with the Diocese of Southwest Florida, is leaving the Episcopal Church (USA) and starting a congregation affiliated with the Anglican Mission in America. At least 200 of the 500-members of St. Marys Episcopal Church are expected to follow the Rev. Dr. Kevin F. Donlon in walking away from a US\$10 million

sanctuary and day school renovation, completed just two months ago.

The AMiA, formed in July of 2000, is a group of about 40 US congregations which have broken away from the Episcopal Church (USA) over their perception that the church has strayed from traditional Anglican theology. The AMiA operates under the authority of the Anglican provinces of Rwanda and South East Asia.

The consecrations of two American priests as bishops in the AMiA in January 2000 and four more in June 2001 have been criticised by church leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury.

+ Anglican Mission in America, PO Box 3427, Pawleys Island, SC 29585 (843) 237-0318
hgriffith@anglicanmissioninamerica.org

Our churches in focus

The Rev. Jan Lion-Cachet from the Port Elizabeth, Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa (our sister church) has accepted the call from the Wellington Reformed Church to be their Home Missionary in Waikanae.

He will arrive in NZ, DV, late May.

Avondale ...

... a vacant church? By no means. That would suggest that nothing is happening and our church is empty. Judging by our weekly calendar, the activities for 2002 are well and truly up and running and our weekly schedule as church members is full.

We are thankful that members have filled the many gaps left by Dirk and Gonny and it is 'business as usual' as regards Catechism,

Women's Fellowship, Sunday School, Friendship Class and Sunday Worship Services. We are also thankful for the support of Rev Sjikr Bajema who is our Presbytery appointed counsellor and the Auckland Presbytery Ministers who we have the pleasure of listening to on a regular basis.

My last input for Faith in Focus was in November 2001 which brought you up to date to the end of August, so I will carry on from there. This edition's photo is of our former Minister and his wife, Dirk and Gonny van Garderen, at their farewell variety evening. This was a colourful event and as you can see Dirk and Gonny were also pretty colourful – dressed in traditional Niuean costume. In their thank you note in the bulletin Dirk said they were



Rev & Mrs van Garderen



'overwhelmed and near speechless!' after the events of that evening. They were presented with a coffee table from the congregation and also a beautiful painting done by one of the Niuean children (both have pride of place in Dirk and Gonny's new home). The evening was a great time of sharing and an opportunity to see church members (young and old) using their singing and acting talents. We are truly thankful to God for the past 12 years that we have been able to share and look forward to the future with another under Shepherd.

Other blessings over the past 7 months, for which we give thanks, include –

- The baptism of **Ashley Jacoba van Garderen**. September 2001
- The official welcome into full fellowship of **Jill Fitzgerald**, who has worshipped with us for the past nine years. October
- The Profession of Faith of **Judith van Trignt and Marcia van de Weg**. November
- The ordination/installation of 2 elders and 2 deacons. December
- The arrival of two new families – **Reuben & Sonja Ploeg** along with their children **Josiah, Molly, Toby, Annwyn, and Daisy** from Pukekohe. – **Carl & Dawn Storm** with **Sarah and Harry** from Bishopdale December February 2002
- The birth and baptism of **Kate Victoria Ploeg** to Chris & Madeleine (nee du Plessis). January 2002
- The birth of **Julian Parker Jensen** to Eddie & Eveline (nee Vos). February
- The birth of **Bradley James Meinsma** to Joshua & Heidi (nee Bosgra). April

We were saddened by the sudden death of **Sister Mimi Munneke** on 24 October at age 56. Mimi had been the Supervisor of the Avondale Christian Kindergarten for more than 20 years and an active member of our congregation in many ways. In the Thanksgiving Service we were granted the assurance and comfort which the Lord promises all who place their hope and comfort for life and death in the Lord Jesus Christ and rest in the knowledge that she has gone to be with Him.

Our Calling Committee has been busy since the middle of last year and calls have been sent to the

Rev Haverland, and to Rev Terence Flanagan from Australia, both of which were declined. We are currently extending a call to the Rev Albert Asselbrugge in Australia and continue to seek God's guidance in this matter (he visited with us the weekend of the 28th of April). We pray that if it is God's will, when I next write it will be with news on this matter.

Helen Wassenaar

CASTLECLIFF HOLIDAY PARK

CABINS, CARAVAN AND CAMPING

**1a Rangiora Street
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Wellington Women's Annual Presbyterial Day – 30th Anniversary

On Saturday, 9th March 2002, the 30th Anniversary of the Wellington Women's Presbyterial meetings was held in Palmerston North. The theme for the day was '*Open Heart, Open Home*', which permeated all our activities and discussions.

The day begun with singing, prayer, and some light-hearted questions such as, "Who has attended the most Presbyterial days?" (which, incidentally was won by Mrs Heeringa, who was given a crown to wear as our 'queen' for the day!).

We were privileged to hear Sally Davey speak on the topic of Hospitality. Sally based her subject on the verses found in 1 Peter 4:9, Luke 14:12-13, gave us some ideas of the why, who and what of hospitality, and challenged us all to be more active and ready in this sometimes difficult but most important task. A warning, ladies from the Auckland and Christchurch Presbyteries: if you attend a Wellington Presbytery Church anytime in the near future, you should get plenty of invitations!

During lunch, some stalls were available to browse and we ended the hour with some exercise (Mainly Music children's action songs), courtesy of Jenny Waldron, who leads our Mainly



1972

Music group in Palmerston North. It was most hilarious to see all the ladies, young and old, swinging their hips to the songs!

Our collection was taken for Help a Child, specifically for the Dharwad Girls Home. We sold recipe books, which were made up from quick recipes from ladies around the Presbytery; the purpose being to be more equipped to 'throw' a meal together when ladies practise hospitality. The collection and recipe book sales reached over \$1000 for the Home.

The afternoon programme started with a roll call and reports from the Ladies' Fellowships around the Presbytery. We then had some celebrations to honour our 'Pioneer' ladies, who started the first Presbyterial day in 1972. Some photos of Presbyterial days over the last 30 years were projected, and brought back many a memory. Our Pioneer ladies then gathered together around the Anniversary cake, which was cut by the first lady to initiate the Presbyterial days, Mrs Lyn Kroon.

The day was thoroughly enjoyed by all the ladies attending. We all had time to catch up with old (and make new!) friends, and to empathise with and encourage each other. Thank you to the many people who helped make this day a success, and to all the ladies who came from afar to share the day with us!



The ladies who attended the 2002 Ladies Presbyterial, hosted by the Palmerston North Ladies Fellowship.

New Zealand Calvinist Cadet Corps & Calvinette Executive Weekend – 2002

From the 15th till the 17th March weekend, 46 Counsellors gathered together from all over the country for the Annual Executive Meeting in Hastings. It was a blessed time of learning, fellowship and encouragement.

On Friday evening we gathered under the grapevined patio area for coffee, slice, and catching up. Those of us who were new were quickly introduced to each other by searching out such strange descriptions and personal details as: 'Keen horse rider—used to bridle her sisters' (Caroline!), 'Has twins' (Sheryl and Jeanette), 'Gets to play with fire' (Bruno), 'Milks her goats everyday' (Angela), 'Has a Greek father' (Gina), and 'Cookie Monster' (Winston). Quite some icebreaker game!

Midnight brought four late Counsellors (from Mangere) who stumbled around in the dark, trying to find their bunks, while giggling and

wondering if they were in the right camp. All was quiet—too quiet, they thought—although in some of the dorms there were small 'earthquakes' of snoring coming through the walls.

Morning dawned beautiful and foggy, and after breakfast (ably supplied by Rob and Andrea Vosslander) we had our meeting. Each club and committee submit reports, and the

Board secretary compiles them into a booklet, which is sent out two months before the meeting. During the meeting, two special awards were presented—one to Cr. Roy Nugteren (Gold Star), and one to Cr. Ian van Woerden (Blue Star)—for their outstanding contributions on a national and provincial level, respectively.

On Saturday afternoon, the hosting Hastings





Wash-up time for the "executive".

Counsellors organised an Orienteering course on Te Mata mountain. We studied maps, tracks, flags, and jigsaw puzzles, before the winning team found the treasure—a Hastings Postcard! And to think two of the Cavinette counsellors thought Maureen was joking when they got teamed up with Lance and Lex, and she asked if they had their running shoes on! There were lovely views over Hastings and Napier district—well worth the hard work done.

We got a big surprise when we turned up for the evening meal: the tables were decked out restaurant-style, with candles and all! A very nice roast dinner added to our enjoyment. Dinner suits and dresses would not have been out of place, but we did get into crayons and

drawing on our placemats for a competition. Ruth won this, and Mike tried very hard. Bribing the judges nearly worked!

Our evening session involved a motivational speaker out to improve our memory. Sorry, I've forgotten his name, but the talk was really good!

On Sunday morning, after a breakfast and quick clean, and pack up, we drove to the Hastings church to join the congregation in worship. Fellowship over a lovely lunch topped off our stay with the Hastings folk.

Thank you to the Hastings Club for organising a great weekend. See you all in Auckland next year!

Betty-Ann Bajema

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Missions in Focus is about what's going on in the world of missions—and Reformed outreach in particular. With this in mind I hopped on the internet one day, and went a-wandering. I found some interesting sites! One such was the website of the Free Presbyterian Church in the United States, complete with a report of a family involved in ministry to the urban poor in Greenville, South Carolina. I wrote to Mark Lauger and he told me more about his work, as well as kindly giving me permission to pass his story on to you. So here it is: a window on the Innercity Gospel Mission.

What it is

Mark writes, "As our name indicates, we are seeking to reach the inner-city neighbourhoods of Greenville, South Carolina, for Christ. Our desire and vision is to reach similar neighbourhoods beyond Greenville. Like so many cities in our country Greenville has neighbourhoods that are full of the poor. Many live in their impoverished condition because of their own vices: drink, drugs, indolence, gambling, fornication, etc. Others live in these conditions because of the sins of their parents.

"This is a whole family ministry. My wife, Leslie, and our children fully participate in many aspects of this outreach. Leslie regularly visits women we get to know. Our children take turns going with me when I am out visiting. They will often share a Scripture passage they have memorised. They have grown up being a part of this ministry. They have a burden for other young people and adults. During our family prayer

time, they will often mention people from downtown.

"Our efforts are old fashioned. We seek to take the Word of God where people live: going from door-step to door-step seeking to give a gospel word. Where people are willing, I conduct weekly Bible studies in their homes. Saturdays are a day for special emphasis on reaching children. Sunday morning we hold a church service for those we have gotten to know in the community—oftentimes leaving the door open to invite passersby in. We try to show Christian hospitality and kindness wherever we can, always seeking to point the sinner to the Christ of the Scriptures who promised, 'Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Other avenues of outreach include jail ministry and hospital visits."

How it all began

This account is a shortened version of an article Mark himself wrote for a publication some time back. It describes the beginnings

of his ministry better than I could, so let's read on and hear how Mark and his family became involved in this work....

"The Kennedys' grass needed to be cut each week. They lived in an attractive house with well-maintained grounds however, the street behind their home was in stark contrast to the Kennedy wealth. That street was lined with shacks with dark dirty paint, rusty bent metal roofs, and heavy screen wire over the windows to afford a little security. Beer and cheap malt liquor were abundant no matter what time of day I was there.

"My job was to cut the Kennedys' grass. Sometimes a panhandler would walk by as I worked, and ask for a couple of dollars. Or a man might come by and ask if I needed help with the mowing. And each time I looked down the street I would say to myself, "The only thing that is going to help this neighborhood is Christ." I was happy to help someone else with a gospel outreach, but at that time I was not interested in starting one myself. Still, the grass needed to be cut, the street looked the same,

and all the while the burden grew heavier. Oftentimes, finding the will of God for our lives is as simple as doing what is before us as we walk with the Lord.

"Finally, for peace of heart and to be about the Lord's work, I went together with a friend from church and set to walking the streets with gospel tracts and the Word of God. The Lord seemed to guide every step of the way. Indeed we took the verse, "He will be our guide" (Ps. 48:14) as our motto. And how much guidance we needed! As it has turned out, our family has moved house five times in the last eight years. I was also in need



Mark Lauger and family, from the Free Presbyterian Church in the US

of God's leading as I took on a radio spot on a rap station, started up a Bible club, conducted Bible studies, and about six years ago started a Sunday morning service."

Meet the people....

From beginning to end, the Lauger family's ministry is one of reaching out to the poor, to those that most of us would never have any association with on a day-to-day basis. In our communication Mark has mentioned Linda, a crack head whose sins were too black to print. She has since come out of that sinful way of life by God's grace and power. She still struggles with other sins, but God has made her a new creature.

Then there's the Hunter family. The Lord has enabled the Laugers to keep up with them for several years through several moves. The two boys' father is in prison, and they live in a home of immorality and drunkenness. Mark and Leslie are asking the Lord to do a work in the lives of these two rough lads and even in the lives of the other family members.

And what about big, friendly Cartwright, one of Mark and Leslie's first contacts? Though polite to them, Cartwright had no interest in the Gospel and lived a life of drinking, fighting, jail, and job-hopping. Mark tried to stay with him, and was in the courtroom the day they sent him to do hard time. However, while he was in the state prison he was saved, and wrote to tell the Laugers the wonderful news! The first time Mark spotted him on the street after his release, Cartwright was witnessing to others. Instead of a tongue full of cursing was a tongue full of memorised Scriptures. How thankful the Laugers are to have witnessed the transformation of this man!

These and many other people in the poor areas of Greenville are the focus of the Lauger family's loving concern in the name of the Lord. Please pray for them, that their hearts would be opened and transformed by the Gospel of grace.

And what of the future?

Mark has mentioned his concern to start a Spanish ministry, to help the influx of migrants who have recently arrived in and around Greenville. Then there's the regular Sunday service, and the need to provide transport for many people who could not attend without such help. The Saturday children's work is also a priority, as is the door to door outreach. Mark says, "I still believe that one of the best places for service is out on the streets. It is there that the drunkard or crack head will most likely first hear a gospel invitation. It is on a porch step that a young child will first learn of the love of God in Christ."

Mark believes it is the Lord's will for this work to continue, and he asks for our prayers to support it. Mark firmly believes that prevailing prayer is of the utmost importance to any Gospel work. So we join him in beseeching the

Lord to attend all of Mark's labours, and those of his fellow-workers, in this difficult harvest-field.

The Free Presbyterian Church holds to the Word of God as the final authority in all matters of life and doctrine, and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as doctrinal standards. To learn more about them or Mark Lauger's ministry, visit their website: <www.freepres.org>.

MIF Prayer Notes

The Overseas Mission Board asks us to continue in our prayers for **Rev Stephen 't Hart** and his wife, **Dorinda**, in their ministry in Papua New Guinea. Pray also that more people from our own churches would respond to the Lord's call to offer themselves for mission work, either long- or short-term.

Home mission Pray for Wanganui fellowship in their efforts to establish a congregation and reach out to the community.

International mission Please continue to pray for members of the Missions Committee of the ICRC, particularly Rev John Goris, who convenes it. Pray for good relationships between the various member churches, and for preparations for regional missions conferences coming up in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Janice Reid's April trip to Perth did not eventuate (see her April Balita! for more detail), but she is due to go there in mid-June, for discussions with a colleague from Cambodia about development of the Hands On Training package that provides a training standard for all FEBC announcers. Please pray for safe travel and effective discussions.

Country profile: BURUNDI

Burundi is a mountainous, fertile country on the north shore of Lake Tanganyika, south of Rwanda. The country has a population (2000 census) of 6,695,001; 90% are listed as "Christian."

For 400 years, Tutsi lordship over the Hutu majority has dominated the political life of Burundi. The human rights record of the government has been appalling—Hutu attempts to gain power have been followed by pogroms in 1972, 1988, and 1993-95. There have been periods of some power sharing between the two ethnic groups since 1988.

Prayer points

For reconciliation between Tutsi and Hutu and for peace to come to the land. All national and international attempts at mediation have failed to bring Hutu rebel factions to the negotiating table.

Revival in the 1950s brought blessing and great church growth, but a generation later the land has been physically, morally and spiritually devastated. The Church is the only institution in the land able to give the point where reconciliation could begin. Only a miracle from God in many hearts will achieve this.

Leadership for the churches is in short supply; persecution and closure of Bible schools cut off the supply of newly trained leaders. Pray for the restoration of full teaching programmes and adequate, godly staff in each institution.

Missionary involvement is small. A former regime expelled nearly all missionaries between 1970 and 1985 and few returned thereafter because of ongoing instability. Pray for the calling of the right missionary personnel and for safety, effectiveness, godly modelling and good relationships with national believers.



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24th Synod of the RCNZ, Christchurch April/May 2002