

faith in **focus**

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Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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*“The LORD gave
and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised.”*

Job 1:21b

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Editorial

All governments have agendas. In other words, they have a philosophical belief which they wish to implement through changes to the law whilst they are in power. Our present government illustrates this with a clearly defined course of social engineering. It is a program they are actively implementing with other political parties sharing the same ideological aims. We have seen this through such legislation as the Civil Union bill, the Charities Commission, the Prostitution Reform Bill, the presently proposed Repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961, and the latest comments by our Prime Minister regarding interference by government agencies in religious bodies to avoid the tensions that have developed elsewhere.

Of course, this is nothing unique to New Zealand. It is a situation which has been occurring all over the western world, particularly in countries where socialist governments rule. Canada's experience has been very similar. Thus the article in this issue which quite clearly illustrated this, and also the way it has been subsequently changed with a minority conservative government, rang a lot of bells. I hope it does with you too.

But allow me to go back to a local example of social engineering. While I could draw on one of the more media-hyped examples I take instead the institution of the Charities Commission. Naturally it was set up through the usual process of a parliamentary committee, inviting submissions, having public consultations, publishing its recommendations, and so on. And naturally the vast bulk of submissions were against such an institution. They felt if something isn't broken it should be left alone. And, indeed, the Charities sector in New Zealand is a very active and efficient part of our society. The government said it was to bring greater accountability into the area of charities and the tax privileges they have. Thus it's no surprise that they have added the availability of all charities financial reports on the website as a further proof of this. What the government didn't tell the public is that this is another part of their control of all sectors of society, particularly any which might have a political basis at odds with theirs.

I took the opportunity to clarify what the Charities Commission was going to do by ringing up their new office. It is in Wellington. I asked the lady where I could contact the local South Auckland officer who would be able to help the many local charities process the extensive paperwork requirement to attain and retain the tax benefits. She informed me that there would only be one field worker and that person would be based in – guess? – Wellington. So I raised my concern that the charities themselves would end up doing a lot of extra work for the government and paying fees for the benefit of this. I don't think she quite shared my philosophical drift!

Actually, I thought I would help the local newspaper be ready for what our government might come up with in the future. I refer to the inserted 'Time for a 'cool' change' letter I sent to a local paper (on page 3). Why am I not surprised it wasn't published?

Where is the wise man?

Where is the scholar?

Where is the philosopher of this age?

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1 Corinthians 1:20

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.

Experimenting on children to change society

*Not Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Nebuchadnezzar's
Babylon or Maoist China, but New Zealand 2007*

Michael L. Drake

The New Zealand government is progressively imposing experiments on children aimed at changing how New Zealand society works. All children in New Zealand have been included among those chosen for these experiments, and since it is the State that has made this decision, parental permission is not being sought.

In effect, schools and agencies such as the Office of the Children's Commissioner, have seized control of the moral development of the nation's youngsters, with a commitment to use their religious concepts and practices in creating a new social order. It is a huge experiment, based on overtly anti-Christian ideas, that will leave a generation of youngsters in a shameful mess.

Three key ideas are running in parallel. The first is that there is no such thing as right and wrong – there is only acceptable or unacceptable "relationship". The second is that the right (or rather, an "acceptable") sort of education will produce a society in which all relationships are acceptable. This shifts the focus of schooling away from learning to experience and social training. The third is that there is no truth, so there can be no heritage of knowledge and wisdom to pass on to children who must make their own knowledge. The knowledge and wisdom of parents and past generations is made worthless and is hidden from children.

The Bible makes clear that as God is Creator and Sustainer of everything and every age, so there is a body of knowledge that is true and valuable, and there is an absolute standard of morality to which he holds us all accountable. But of equal yet often overlooked importance is the eschatological hope with which the Bible shapes a believer's view of the present: the present is not only built on the past and measured by God's unchanging standards, it is temporary. This corrupted creation is terminal, and we and our children are called to live not for the present but for God and for eternity. We are God's, and while he calls us to live for him now, we do so with the sure hope of living with him for ever.

In contrast, the state claims total sovereignty over everyone, demanding that we and our children live with one aim: satisfying the state's demand for oneness without God.

Anti-Christian National Curriculum for ignorance

Last year the Government released a new National Curriculum for state schools that makes plain its determination to keep children ignorant but happy. Never has there been a clearer statement of the anti-Christian basis of state education.

The curriculum makes experience central to schooling instead of knowledge and skill. Knowledge and skill now don't matter so long as every child has the same experiences that make him a child of the state. Children can study anything in any context so long as they have the "right" experiences that change their values from what a family believes to what the state believes. One of the most revealing statements in this National Curriculum is that the curriculum is meant to engage the support of students' families. But it should be the other way round: school should support families.

The curriculum lists five "Key Competen-

cies" expressing the mix of self centeredness and submission to the state that is prescribed. Managing Self begins with giving students assurance that they can do anything regardless of knowledge, skill or maturity. Relating to Others means students must abandon any beliefs or practices (such as Christ's claim to be the only way to God) that are exclusive. Participating and Contributing expresses a Marxist environmental view of society.

When it comes to the Key Competency of Thinking one might expect something we value. But "thinking" in this curriculum means that "students are creators of knowledge." The English syllabus, for example, has just two skills that are to be taught at all levels: "making knowledge" and "creating knowledge". Children learning English are no longer expected say what an author means; instead they create their own meaning in response to what they read or hear. And as for writing and speaking, children can't

Time for a 'cool' change

A huge sigh of relief was felt amongst the press as Dr Cullen announced that summer was being cancelled. Every journalist there nodded in warm agreement as the good doctor outlined the government decision that it was in the best interests of the nation that there be no warmer months at this time. 'You see,' he declared, 'we can't really trust people to look after themselves with all those dangerous UV levels out there. It's far better if we simply delete it as a season altogether. You can be relieved that we are looking after you. Not only will it reduce skin cancer rates but it will mean substantial dietary improvement. Also with the labour force continuing to work through this period there are the huge budgetary excesses which we manage best for you.'

He went on, 'This is not to say that in future summer might not be restored for say a week or so rather than its usual three-month period. But at the moment it is not fiscally prudent to allow any of New Zealand's population to have any sense of enjoyment whatsoever. The government is in the best position to monitor this on behalf of everyone.'

The Prime Minister endorsed Dr Cullen's comments. She had been concerned for some time that there were elements in our society who were misusing the laws of nature to suit their own hedonistic desires. Ms Clark noted, 'Aside from a few rather narrow-minded and selfish individuals across from me in Parliament, this has universal support from this nation's elected representatives.'

Mr Winston Peters nodded in strong agreement, secure in the knowledge that the pensioner's platinum card was through its second reading, while Mr Peter Dunne also smiled profusely, with a dreamy look in his eyes as he looked forward to further advances for sensible and hard-working New Zealanders.

Meanwhile, Jeannette Fitzsimmons had already indicated her support for this latest government policy. She said it was already on record that anything as revolutionary and world-first as banning a season of the year had always been Green Party policy.

pass knowledge on to others any more than they can gain it from others. So they make knowledge for themselves in what they write and speak with no expectation that it will do anything for their listeners or readers other than offer them an opportunity to respond by creating their own knowledge!

The Key Competency of Using Language, Symbols and Texts is not about knowledge and accuracy, but seeing "their world from new perspectives." In maths, for example, students should "be able to discover, express, and explore the relationships found in quantities, space, and data." But there is no

is achieved by giving all children the same experiences, after which they must be given the same recognition. Anyone who has had the experience has reached the standard regardless of what is known or what skills have been gained.

The banning of punishment

The Children's Commissioner has consistently published her aim of eliminating all forms of what she calls "negativity" in the discipline of children. She explains that children should be rewarded for what they do that is "acceptable". Rebuking children

be legal to use force to "prevent immediate harm" but not for correction.) Already one national childcare agency has prohibited "time-out" in the care of children, even while it continues to make submissions to Parliament that "time out" is a legitimate option to smacking.

Behind this is a fundamental rejection of God and the concept of universal standards of right and wrong derived from God. According to this philosophy, when children need correction by parents it is because the relationship between them has broken down and, as equals, they need to negotiate a restoration of relationship.

Mystic sessions for schools

The Education Gazette, the official journal of the Ministry of Education, carried in its 5 June 2006 edition an article encouraging schools to use "Circle Time" to bring social harmony to schools. Children sit around in a circle and discuss "personal issues". It is reported by the Gazette "to be spreading like wildfire" among schools, partly because "parents in some ways don't have time for their children."

At one level "Circle Time" is group therapy – "You talk together as a class and can express your feelings and get people to help you with your problems." But it goes beyond that. In England the system is often called "Magic Circle" because the idea of the circle is that it empowers children in a mystical way, but New Zealand sensitivities to "magic" in schools have apparently caused a more subtle approach. In India, Jenney Mosley, promoted by the Gazette as the expert on Circle Time, was far less coy. She told the Indians that "[Hindu] philosophy is the same as the philosophy of the whole Circle Time model – about integrating the spiritual, emotional, academic and physical beings."

Circle Time is not the only religion being introduced into schools with official sanction. Brain Gym is spreading just as rapidly in schools. This involves New Age centering techniques to harmonise spiritual, emotional and rational thought. Brain Gym is said to incorporate three dimensions: "Heart-space, personal-space, and connection to spirit."

Social relationships the school curriculum core

John Dewey shaped modern state schooling on the idea that social relationships were more important than knowledge. New Zealand schools are implementing that model with zeal. Most parents will receive School Reports that tell more about how well a child can cooperate and how well he participates

Children's books today

From a New Zealand children's book author:

Of course part of the trouble in our education system, and those neo-Marxists who have so long been determining its directions. New Zealand youngsters have not and are not being offered the great intellectual gifts of the west, drawn from the discoveries and thinking of so many races – Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Arabic, Nordic, Celtic – the heritage of the mind, passed down to us via the civilizing philosophy of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This always emphasized the importance, and the worth of every individual – and the golden rule, which no other religion or culture has bettered – do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Yet if this philosophy were universally applied and accepted, the world and the world for children, would be a far better place. Instead, this philosophy has been not only neglected – it's been openly disparaged in a breathtakingly successful attack on Western values as "colonial" and oppressive.

The children's writing scene has shared in the devaluing of our culture. I have been attacked for references to Greek mythology which quite naturally formed the background of two of my stories in particular. I was told I should have made them Maori – though this cultural reference had nothing whatever to do with these stories!

From an interview with Amy Brooke in 'Investigate' magazine, January, 2007.

demand here that they calculate accurately. As another Government paper (NEMP: Mathematics) explains, "Expecting students to get the right answers ... is no longer the prime goal of mathematics education."

Although the curriculum speaks of excellence, it is not upholding the ideal of measuring achievement by external standards, but of giving students recognition regardless of achievement. This is reflected in the pronouncements of Dr Karen Poutasi (then head of NZQA): all NCEA certificates are of equal value, regardless of what is studied and whether or not they have endorsements of "achieved", "merit" or "excellence". Awarding certificates that recognise one student as better than another destroys the curriculum's concept of equity. Excellence

for wrongdoing is one of the negative things she wants stopped. This agenda is being pushed on parents through a range of state and private agencies.

Green MP Sue Bradford has correctly stated that her Bill to remove Section 59 from the Crimes Act is not about stopping smacking because its about making any use of force in the correction of a child illegal. As she explained to Investigate Magazine in June 2006, "Repeal of s59 is only one small strand of what we need to do." This Bill is a step on the way, one that will make all use of force in correcting children illegal. That means not just smacking will be illegal, but forcing a child to stay in her room, or holding him by the hand to make him go where you want him to go will be an assault. (It will still

than what he knows or what he can do. That is because the curriculum tells teachers that is what is important.

One example is published in the Education Gazette of 19 June 2006. Under the heading Inspirational Exemplars it includes a report of a series of four Social Studies lessons taught at Penrose High School. Instead of the teacher deciding what students needed to know, they were shown a set of photographs and over one and a half periods formed questions about the photos based on what they already knew. They then made a presentation from what they already knew in answer to their questions. The lessons were “constructed with six common features.” Acquiring knowledge was not on the list. When it was finished, the lessons were successful because students participated, not because there was any evidence they had gained knowledge.

Practising sex

There is relentless pressure on schools to ensure children have practised using condoms. Ten years ago Family Planning supplied schools with a kitset for children aged 10 – 14 that included wooden genitals and condoms. The instructions that came with it were that these items should be handed around the students to “break down their inhibitions” and to teach them how to have sex safely. Today’s classroom teaching aids with which children can practise are more sophisticated plastic models that replicate body functions.

While there are still some requirements on informing parents about official “sex education classes”, group instruction, and instruction about such things that are not part of the official “sex education” programme, can take place without parents’ knowledge. School counsellors are specifically exempt from a requirement to advise parents about the lessons they give children individually or in small groups, or about the supply of contraceptives to children of any age, or about securing medical services for children.

State to decide valid Christian beliefs

Dame Silvia Cartwright, when Governor General, the Prime Minister, and the Children’s Commissioner have all made pointed statements about what Christians should believe about various things, especially in the context of the debate about smacking. One of the more direct attacks on Christians has been in the booklet Children are Unbeatable published by the Children’s Commissioner and Unicef, and launched at Parliament in 2006. In it Christians are told they should

“choose a God who abhors violence: to connect with an historical Jesus who did not use violence.” Christians are told the right way and wrong way to interpret Proverbs, that smacking children is inconsistent with loving them, and that Christians must not judge children’s behaviour. It falsely caricatures the Bible as “often” portraying “human beings as fallen sinful creatures who need to be punished or to suffer in order to be saved” and gives a highly debateable interpretation of Hebrew texts.

Now of course in a secular state citizens should be free to debate religious faith, and no one should be compelled by the state to hold to any particular belief. But here, under the authority of the state and with taxpayer funds, one particular belief and an associated set of interpretations of the Bible, are being officially promoted by as “acceptable” in contrast to orthodox Christian faith and interpretation which is being declared “unacceptable.”

Families are having children taken by the State

Sue Bradford makes much of the misleading idea that the Police will exercise discretion if complaints about parents smacking their children arise after s59 is repealed. But already the police hand most complaints to Social Welfare agencies (CYF) who have the power to take children without evidence and without a court hearing – and do so. Children are being taken from parents even when a court finds no crime has been committed.

Much is made of the example of Sweden where it is argued things got better after smacking was banned. In fact, the evidence on this is totally faked. But more importantly, in Sweden, under the impact of reforms Bradford and the Children’s Commissioner want to implement here, more children are being taken from parents than in any other European state. There is a huge catalogue of state abuse of parents and children, and it continues.

If in New Zealand, the legal right to smack children for correction is taken away and replaced by Police discretion, we will have a Police state. The Police will write their “protocols” which they won’t have to publish, and will implement their own rules in their own way without the safeguards of citizens knowing the law or the police having to answer to parliament.

A challenge to Christians

The impact of these various beliefs and practices is clear: the state is demanding control of the minds and moral education

of children, and is already implementing various practices that are in some cases subtly but in others openly antichristian. The fundamental belief is that if children experience a different kind of schooling, and punishment-free family life where they are the centre of everything, society will be different. We can agree only with the last point – its just that we don’t believe society will be better.

Our response should be more than shock or disdain, much less a smug voyeurism that “tut-tuts” over evil but does nothing about it. Our response should be more than a callous withdrawal from society, a sort of virtual Reformed monasticism. It must be more than (although never less than) the protection of our children by keeping them from godless schooling and nurturing them in an expressly biblical curriculum. It must be more than (though never less than) public proclamation of the truth, with the petitioning of and praying for those in authority to govern uprightly. We must live faithfully, letting our lights shine; we must live actively as the salt of the earth; we must live loving our neighbours, compassionately drawing them to Christ and to the truth and wisdom of the Word of God.

Michael Drake is the principal of Carey Christian College. He has spoken at many Christian Education Conferences, written a number of books, and is an elder in the Tamaki Reformed Baptist Church. Of what he has written on the subject of social engineering “by Fear and Fallacy,” analysing the present legislation to repeal Article 59 of the Crimes Act, is recommended reading. It may be downloaded for free from www.careycollege.com or in printed form by sending \$5 to 21 Domain Road, Panmure, Auckland

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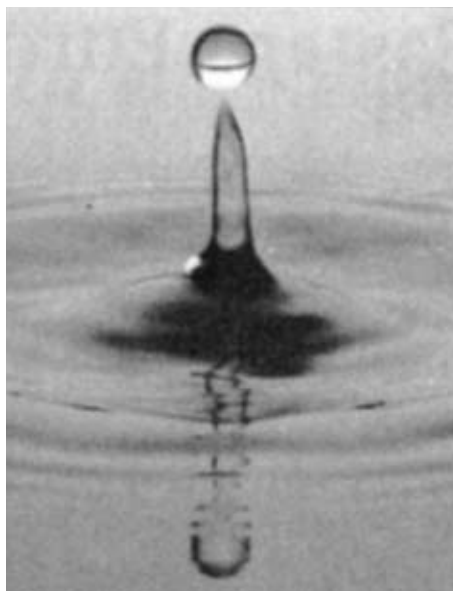
A lesson from Canada

Hermina Dykxhoorn

Several years ago I attended a conference on women's issues hosted by Status of Women Canada, a ministry of the federal government. Ten women from each province and territory were invited to participate. This "representative sample" of Canadian womanhood was to meet for four days in one of the best hotels in Edmonton, with transportation from across the country to Edmonton and all meals provided. It was apparent that I was the only conservative woman present. Obviously it was difficult for them to choose all radical liberal women, especially from the province of Alberta, and still call it a "representative sample". So I was the token conservative in a swarm of zealots. Naturally, the conclusions and recommendations to the government reflected, not the views of ordinary Canadian women but those of the assembled ideologues.

I remember it well as the most uncomfortable four days I've ever experienced. And every dime spent on this useless; no dangerous, conference came from the Canadian taxpayer. Status of Women Canada is a fully funded federal government agency that spends at least \$26 million dollars a year promoting radical gender feminist ideas in government and society. They have managed to embed themselves in every government department as a watchdog sniffing out any perceived discrimination against women and re-educating recalcitrant civil servants, bureaucrats and judges in feminist ideology. In the mid-90s the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families, which I chaired at the time, intervened in the Vriend case, one of several homosexual rights court interventions purposely launched to chip away at Canada's social values and establish sodomy as a right, equal in every respect with heterosexual marriage and family. From our donor base of largely grassroots Alberta women we managed to raise \$120,000 to intervene through the three court levels to the Supreme Court of Canada. Delwin Vriend and the radical homosexual rights groups supporting him were funded almost entirely by taxpayer dollars. Canadians looking for reasons why the homosexual and feminist agendas have had such success in Canada, compared to the United States, for example, can find

at least a partial answer in the Federal Government's Court Challenges Program (CCP). This taxpayer funded gravy train for leftist radicals has allowed them to launch court cases to further the causes of what they call "aggrieved groups", groups that already have the same rights as all Canadians, but who, in reality, want to destroy the Canadian way of life, historically based, as it is, on Christian principles. Because of the CCP hundreds of cases on women's rights, homosexual advancement, prisoner voting rights and children's (anti-spanking) rights against their parents, have been heard, and many



have been won, in the past two decades. Legislation, passed by Canada's elected representatives in Parliament, has been thrown out by unelected judges hearing cases introduced by the extremist groups funded by these programs. Those of us opposing this cozy set-up have had little success with the government that established the system and was committed to its maintenance. Indeed, the Liberals used these programs to further causes they agreed with but knew they could never pass through Parliament.

When the Conservatives replaced the Liberals this January, there was speculation on whether they would cut funding to a host of activist programs. One way a minority government can make a tangible difference without risking defeat is to use its discretionary powers to reduce spending on programs deemed inefficient, unnecessary

or redundant. After years under a government that wanted to impact every area of Canadians lives there are many such programs. On September 25 Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Treasury Board President John Baird announced that \$1 billion dollars would immediately be cut from a variety of government agencies, with an additional \$1 billion to be axed in the next two years. The Court Challenges Program was, thankfully, completely eliminated. Ditto for the Law Commission of Canada, a group of radical lawyers and judges who, ostensibly, "advise" Parliament on how to modernize and improve legislation. In fact, this group of legal beagles never saw a radical project they didn't like, and promote, using government money. A \$5 million cut in funding to Status of Women Canada will seriously impede their work of reorganizing Canada into a matriarchy. The Medical Marijuana Research Project was also eliminated, saving \$4 million, and \$10 million was saved by nixing an unsuccessful program that sought to curb smoking among natives. In all, almost 70 programs were either completely eliminated or drastically reduced.

This action by the Harper government, while it doesn't go nearly far enough, shows an intention of actually reducing the size and pernicious influence of government in the lives of Canadians. The Conservatives are sticking their necks out. While popular with their base, these initiatives will not go over well with the powerful liberal-left special interest groups that are the main beneficiaries of the previous government's largesse. These groups are used to getting their way and by making lots of noise, they usually do. Those of us who applaud these initiatives generally fade into the woodwork letting our opponents bully our representatives into submission. Does that describe you? Don't let it. For most Canadians axing these programs is a welcome bit of debt reduction and that's a bonus, no matter how small. But for Christians it means that the flow of funding for programs that have had evil consequences in our country has been reduced and in some cases stopped altogether. A very welcome occurrence.

This article originally appeared in Christian Renewal, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

World in focus

Young British Christian Aid worker stoned to death

A murder investigation has been launched in India after the body of 23-year-old Michael Blakey was discovered near the St. John's Church in the Wilderness, Dharamsala, in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh where Blakey worshipped.

Blakey disappeared on 23 November, but his body was discovered three days later. Police sources in the region said that Blakey's injuries were consistent with him being stoned to death. The motivation for the killing remains unclear.

Blakey, a graduate of Swansea University in Wales, had taken a year to work with the Tong Len charity which he helped set up after hearing of the plight of the Tibetan refugees.

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

+ Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP, Wales, UK

Church divided over Old Tennent Cemetery

The nine members of the Old Tennent Cemetery Board of Trustees received a letter in which they were informed that, effective immediately, they had been cast out of the Old Tennent Church. They were no longer trustees of its 300-year-old cemetery. They were to hand over all of their keys, records, and chequebooks and walk away from a historical church and cemetery they have served and maintained for decades, even generations.

The letter is the latest development in the battle between the governing body of Old Tennent Church and the Cemetery Board of Trustees for control of the Old Tennent Cemetery and its US\$4.5 million in assets. This is a conflict that has been going on for years, and has divided the once thriving and close-knit Presbyterian church.

On 5 January, Judge Vincent J. Grasso, in Ocean County Superior Court will hear arguments from the Cemetery Board of Trustees, who sued the Session in June for losing control of the cemetery. The Session's position is that the cemetery and its assets have always been a part of the church, and therefore are under its control. The Board of Trustees contends that the cemetery has always been a separate and autonomous business entity, one that has successfully expanded and maintained the non-denominational burial ground for generations.

+ Old Tennent Cemetery, Box 5, Tennent, NJ 07763 (732) 446-9238

Reformed churches told not to fear unity in South Africa

A gathering of 127 local and regional leaders of the Dutch Reformed family in South Africa met on 6-8 November telling local congregations they should not fear being forced to change language or worship style because of church unification. Leaders from all four denominations in the unity process affirmed that the identity of each group, including language and style differences, was important, believing that the

diversity would be constructive on the path toward unification.

The representatives reaffirmed their decision to press forward toward unity.

The group also identified some core values in the process; such as theological integrity, uncompromising faithfulness to God through the Word and Spirit, trustworthiness and humility, respect and honesty toward each other, and acceptance of each other. Task forces were established to manage the various processes toward unity. Their next meeting is scheduled for March 2007.

+ REC, 2050 Breton Rd., SE, Suite 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (616) 949-2910

Evangelism Explosion announces partnership

Evangelism Explosion International announced on 6 December their new partnership with the Christian Community Foundation of South Florida (CCFSF) to establish the D. James and Anne Kennedy Foundation for World Evangelism.

The new foundation will support the development of up to 12 international training centres for long-term leadership training and the equipping of every people group to witness to every person.

Evangelism Explosion was born in 1962 when Kennedy realised the vision of changing the world through multiplication — training witnesses to train witnesses — which would 'explode' the growth patterns of churches, according to the ministry's Multiply publication.

+ Evangelism Explosion International, PO Box 23820, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33307 (954) 491-6100

+ Christian Community Foundation of South Florida, 5120 North Federal Highway, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33308 (954) 771-0110

Brown University reinstates Reformed University Fellowship

Brown University has reinstated Reformed University Fellowship as an official campus religious group by following a set of rules laid down for other campus organisations.

On 13 September the group was informed via an E-mail from Janet Cooper, the university's chaplain, that its status as a recognised student organisation had been withdrawn. The campus religious group has about 100 members and is affiliated with Trinity Presbyterian Church, an evangelical congregation in Providence, Rhode Island.

Ethan Wingfield, president of the Reformed University Fellowship, said he was pleased at the Brown administration's decision but was also disappointed because he believes the university wasn't specific about why the group was suspended in the first place.

+ Brown University, Providence, RI 02912 (401) 863-1000

Klaas Runia

On 14 October, Professor Klaas Runia, a former President of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), passed away. Klaas Runia first came to the REC as a representative from the Re-

formed Churches in Australia and was elected President of the REC in 1968 after returning to The Netherlands in 1971.

Runia was also delegated to the REC by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, serving four more terms on the REC executive, then called the Interim Committee.

Runia served for many years as Rector of the Theological University of Kampen, but was also editor of the newspaper *Centraal Weekblad*. From there Runia wrote weekly articles, making the theological world available to church members across the Netherlands.

Runia served in years of terrible tensions in the REC, struggling with theological changes in his own church, and was an advocate for those opposing apartheid.

+ REC, 2050 Breton Rd., SE, Suite 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (616) 949-2910

Taking the Nigeria road

On 17 December, some of Virginia's most impressive Episcopal churches voted to transfer allegiance from the Diocese of Virginia to the Church of Nigeria. The Falls Church and Truro Church date from the mid-1700s and collectively own an estimated US\$27 million worth of land in the western suburbs of the nation's capitol. Annually these two churches contribute US\$14 million to the diocese.

Precise figures are hard to determine but the departure of these churches and an estimated 10 more in the area could take 8,000 of the 90,000 members of the diocese out of the Episcopal Church. Knowledgeable observers indicate the departing group accounts for 20 percent of the people in the pew on an average Sunday and upwards of 40 percent of the diocesan weekly revenues.

What happens in Virginia will make an impact across the nation. The Episcopal Church is the heir of the Church of Virginia founded at Jamestown in 1607 and still holds the allegiance of more than 180,000 communicants organized into two of America's largest dioceses.

+ Presbyterians-week Presbyterians-Week@Christian-Observer.org

Youth ministers go back to the Bible

The November 6 issue of TIME reports a shift in direction away from an 'MTV-style' youth ministry to more 'Bible-based worship' in evangelical churches.

'Youth ministers have been on a long and frustrating quest of their own over the past two decades or so. Believing that a message wrapped in pop-culture packaging was a way to attract teens to their flocks, pastors watered down the religious content and boosted the entertainment. But in recent years churches have begun offering their young people a style of religious instruction grounded in Bible study and teachings about the doctrines of their denomination.

Their conversion has been sparked by the recognition that sugar-coated Christianity, popular in the 1980's and early '90's, has caused growing numbers of kids to turn away not just

from attending youth-fellowship activities but also from practicing their faith at all.'

'The vast majority of teens who call themselves Christians haven't been well educated in religious doctrine and therefore don't really know what they believe,' says Christian Smith, a University of Notre Dame sociologist.

+ *Christian Renewal*, P.O. Box 777, Jordan Station, Ontario L0R 1S0, Canada

Same-sex blessing rejected by Church of Scotland Presbyteries

Church of Scotland presbyteries have voted overwhelmingly against proposals that would allow ministers to bless same-sex partnerships without risk of discipline.

The number of presbytery members opposing the right of ministers to mark civil partnerships without fear of disciplines is double the number of those which support such a move, reports The Scotsman newspaper.

Ministers in the Church of Scotland will still be able to mark a civil partnership should they wish, although they risk censure from their presbyteries.

+ *Forward Together (Church of Scotland)*, 2 Lanark Rd., Kirkmuir, ML 11 9RB

Morocco sees rise in Christian conversions

According to Adnkronos International, Morocco's Islamic leaders are concerned with the increase in the number of Moroccans who are converting to Christianity.

Abdel Halim, a physician who converted to Christianity 16 years ago, told pan-Arabic satellite TV station, al-Arabiya, that 'We're more than 1,000 and we have some 50 churches present in towns and cities throughout the country. For security reasons, we cannot admit that we have converted and we are often forced to move as if we were a clandestine organization.'

+ *Breaking Christian News*, 310 2nd Ave., SE, Albany, OR 97321 (541) 928-2642

Bringing Christ back to the YMCA

An article published by the L.A. Times states that there is a growing movement to bring Christ back into the YMCA. According to the report, about 13 percent of the more than 2,600 YMCA branches across the country have set up special committees to promote Christianity and hundreds of Y leaders convene each year to swap ideas on how to 'lift up the 'C' in the YMCA.

Scott Reall, who runs a Christian ministry at a Nashville YMCA says, 'It has the opportunity to spread Christian healing throughout the world. People come to the YMCA hurting. Alcoholism, bulimia, divorce, grief, pornography addictions, loneliness, drug abuse . . . They're looking for so much more than exercise.'

+ *YMCA of the USA*, 101 North Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60606 (800) 872-9622

Buddha statues ordered removed from orphanage

Malawi's Human Rights Commission has ordered a Taiwanese-funded orphanage to remove statues of Buddha from all dormitories, saying their presence amounts to brainwashing children into joining Buddhism against their will.

The Amitofo Care Centre near Blantyre opened three years ago and was touted as the biggest orphanage in southern Africa operated by followers of Buddhism. The centre has statues of the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, in all the dormitories and an elaborate temple situated within the orphanage.

Commissioner John Kapito said the Human Rights Commission acted on research at the centre stemming from concerns expressed by relatives of orphans about the statues in the dormitories and that the children may be forced to become followers of Buddhism.

The centre's director, Mastor Hui Li, said that while the centre was a Buddhist organisation, no one was ever forced into becoming a follower of Buddhism.

+ *Ms. Y. L. Ko, Nan Hua Temple*, (013) 931-0009 ext. 316

Harvard introduces third gender choice

According to American Family Association Journal, prospective applicants to Harvard Business School no longer have to declare themselves to be either male or female, but now they have a third choice. The three choices are male, female, or transgender. The application also asks prospective applicants if they would be interested in learning more about the school's lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community.

+ *Harvard Business School*, Soldiers Field, Boston, MA 02163 (617) 495-6000

Christian School finder

Harold Naylor, a member of Faith PCA in Wilmington, Delaware, works for a Christian school in Pennsylvania, and along with others has developed a web site to connect parents with Christian schools with a 7,000+ database that can be searched by zip code. The site also provides a Biblical apologetic for why parents should think and pray about placing their children in a Christian school.

+ *Christian School database*: <<http://www.discover-christianschools.com>>

"Hall of Shame" released by the Pacific Justice Institute

The Pacific Justice Institute, an American non-profit legal defence organisation that specialised in the defence of religious freedom, parental rights, and other civil liberties, has released its annual 'Hall of Shame' list:

1. Massachusetts Supreme Court requires same-sex marriage to be allowed.
2. San Francisco judge blocks enforcement of Proposition 83, which would have given children more protection against paedophiles.
3. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signs SB 1441, which requires faith-based organisations to hire transsexuals and homosexuals
4. Pastor accused of 'hate speech' for distributing 9/11 tracts comparing Christianity with Islam.
5. Mark Foley, whose committee is responsible for protecting kids, is involved in pornographic E-mails to congressional pages.
6. Federal court rules that parents have no rights to challenge explicit sex surveys given to their children at public schools.

7. Washington State Supreme Court declares that unions have a constitutional right to spend forced dues as they please.

8. Riverside city employee silences Christmas carollers.

9. Ninth Circuit upholds suspension of Poway student wearing T-shirt in opposition to the Day of Silence (a day of support for homosexuality).

10. California voters say 'no' to allowing parents to be told of their minor child's impending abortion.

+ *The Pacific Justice Institute*, (916) 857-6900 <pacificjustice.org>

City in Florida won't arrest pro-life advocates at abortion centre

City officials in Altamonte Springs, Florida, are backing off previous threats to arrest pro-life advocates outside the 'All Women's Health Centre of Orlando' abortion facility. Altamonte Springs police officers had threatened to arrest Patte Smith and David Riser with citation and arrest until the Liberty Counsel, a pro-life law firm, stepped in on behalf of the pair who were standing on public sidewalks at the abortion centre and on adjacent private property with the owner's permission.

Smith and Riser were talking about abortion and offering women assistance and alternatives to abortion, and some counsellors held signs.

'The constitution protects the rights of individuals to peacefully gather and express their opinions,' Liberty Counsel founder Mathew Staver said about the case.

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

Women's group lobby to remove restrictions on women ministers

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), voted in 2006 to remove the word male from its description of ordained ministers and elders in its church order. However, that synod also said that ordained women could not serve as synodical deputies nor be delegated to synod.

Furthermore, it decided Synod should not revisit these decisions for seven years. The decision about synodical deputies, who represent synod at neighbouring regional bodies called classis meeting, reversed an earlier practice.

A subsequent synod must approve any change in the church order, however, so those decisions will come before the synod again in 2007. Several groups have arisen to oppose the restrictions on synodical deputies and delegates. Classis Lake Erie has already drafted an overture to lift the ban on deputies and delegates. Other classes are considering similar motions.

A group of women pastors and chaplains from the western Michigan area around Grand Rapids have called for the removal of all restrictions particular to women. Calling themselves 'Hearts Aflame,' they have organised four prayer vigils, including one for the opening day of synod, 9 June 2007.

+ *Christian Reformed Church in North America*, 2850 Kalamazoo Av., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560 (616) 241-1691

Gaelic sermons to be preached four times per year in London

The Rev. Alexander John MacLeod, a retired minister, left the Kirk several hundred thousand pounds — on condition Gaelic sermons are preached in London four times a year.

Church of Scotland leaders were surprised at the legacy and will be meeting this month to decide how to spend the cash.

MacLeod, who died in his nineties last year after retiring to the Far East, was a fluent speaker of Gaelic.

Gaelic-speaking MSP for the Western Isles Alasdair Morrison said the bequest was great news, saying: 'For many people, it's important to worship in their native tongue.'

+ Church of Scotland, Central Administration Office, 121 George St., Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

Merger of International Bible Society and Send The Light

An announcement was made on 15 January 2007, following a three-month due diligence period, that International Bible Society (IBS), and Send the Light (STL), intend to merge organisations. IBS is one of the world's largest translators and distributors of Scripture, and STL is one of the world's largest distributors of Christian literature.

Keith Danby, CEO of STL said, 'The blending of these organisations is a powerful combination. It's not too often that two ministries can come together with the potential to have such far-reaching global impact for the cause of Christ and the Bible.' Upon completion of the merger, Danby will assume the position of Global CEO for the blended organisation.

Boards of both organisations have agreed to work toward a 1 March 2007 official merger date.

The merged organisation will be called IBS-STL and will have operations in the USA, the United Kingdom, India, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the world. The organisation will also combine the core competencies of Bible translation, Bible and Christian book publishing, and global distribution into one of the largest and most far-reaching Christian literature agencies in the world.

+ International Bible Society, 1820 Jet Stream Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80921

+ Send the Light, Kingstown Broadway, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0HA, United Kingdom

Pastor denounces actions of Ian Paisley

The Rev. Ivan Foster, a senior Free Presbyterian minister, has denounced Dr Ian Paisley's stance on the St. Andrews Agreement, a peace proposal for Northern Ireland.

Paisley is widely recognised as the leader of Ulster's conservative Calvinists.

Foster said he was 'heartbroken' at the prospect of Mr. Paisley in government with Martin McGuinness, and said he was praying that God would intervene and stop power-sharing between the DUP (Democratic Unionists Party), and Sinn Fein. Foster also said, 'There is principle being pursued, by the leadership of the DUP, a coalition with the murderers of Sinn Fein.'

Foster admitted it was unusual for a minister to be openly critical of his own church, but said

if Mr Paisley goes into government with Sinn Fein it would do 'great, great harm' to his name and that of the church.

+ DUP HQ, 91 Dundela Ave., Belfast BT4 3BU

Half of Iraq's Christian have fled

Violence in Iraq has prompted half of the Christians in Iraq to emigrate, says an official of the Chaldean patriarchate of Baghdad.

In a story that appeared on the www.Zenit.org web site, Auxiliary Bishop Andraos Abouna explained how the international charity — Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) — is helping to provide shelter, food, and medical support for these and other refugees. Leaders of the group have sheltered more than 35,000 Christians who have sought refuge in Syria.

The story also reported that ACN has offered emergency aid to Christians desperate to flee the religious conflict and the dire poverty engulfing Iraq.

Bishop Abouna underlined the increasing dangers for Christians still in Iraq, saying the refugees in Syria had reported how Christians and others had received death threats and how women, including girls, were being forced to wear the veil in keeping with Islamic law.

+ Aid to the Church in Need, St. Josephs, 151 St. Mobhi Rd., Dublin, Ireland

Board game designed by ex-atheist and ex-evolutionist

'Intelligent Design versus Evolution' is a new board game that was designed by actor Kirk Cameron and best-selling author Ray Comfort to help fight against what they maintain is the brainwashing of an entire generation.

Cameron said, 'We are very excited about this game because it presents both sides of the creation evolution argument, and in doing so, shows that the contemporary theory of evolution is perhaps the greatest hoax of modern times.'

Comfort said, 'This game didn't happen by accident. It was intelligently designed with a specific purpose in mind, and we hope it creates a big bang in the Christian and secular world.'

'Intelligent Design versus Evolution' is available through Christian bookstores, or through the website.

+ Intelligent Design versus Evolution, <www.WayOfTheMaster.com.>

Personal income to church declining

An annual study of church giving by Sylvia and John Ronsvalle, who have published 16 editions of the study through 'Empty Tomb Inc.,' a Christian service and research organisation in Champaign, Illinois, states that the average US congregation member gave 2.56 percent of personal income to the church in 2004, a decline for the fourth straight year. That's down 18 percent from 1968 and below giving levels from the early 1930s at the height of the Depression. Yet income has climbed steadily since 1933.

The percentage of the average church member's income devoted to internal congregational operations was at 2.18 percent in 2004, on par with figures from the mid-1970s.

But the amount used for benevolent causes

outside the congregation has declined to 0.38 percent, about one-third of a penny for every dollar of income. Whereas more than 21 percent of the typical church member's giving went to external ministries in 1968, the amount was less than 15 percent in 2004.

+ Empty Tomb Inc., 301 North Fourth St., PO Box 2402, Champaign, IL 61825 (217) 356-2262

250 million Christians worldwide face persecution

As many as 250 million Christians worldwide will face persecution and repression in 2007 just for following Jesus Christ, according to Release International a voice for the persecuted church.

Release International has found that most persecution takes place in four distinct 'zones;' those of Islam, Communism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. But persecution is growing fastest of all in the Islamic world.

+ Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR 5 9 RT <info@releaseinternational.org>

Nigerian State's policies said to strangle Christianity

As soon as Christians in Lafia, the capital city of Nigeria's Nasarawa state, tried to rebuild a Reformed Church building that Muslims burned down two years ago, more than 200 Islamists attacked the workers. The rebuilding came to a halt, and the Nasarawa state government banned reconstruction of the facility. 'I personally witnessed the attack on the workers at the reconstruction site of the church,'" said the Rev. Jerry Modibo, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Nasarawa state chapter. 'The Muslims were chanting, 'Death to Christians, death to infidels. This town is for Muslims, we don't want Christians here.' Banning church-building, he said, is just one way Nasarawa is stifling Christianity in the central Nigerian state.

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

Christian law group sues over anti-abortion fliers

A national Christian legal group has sued a school district and high school principal over a student's attempt to distribute anti-abortion materials.

The student obtained permission from the assistant principal to distribute the fliers at school, only to have the principal reverse the decision, according to the Alliance Defense Fund of Scottsdale, Arizona.

Penn Cambria High School Principal Kathy Nagle instead told students that requests to distribute literature required her approval two weeks in advance.

The suit was filed in federal court in Pittsburgh on behalf of the unidentified student and her mother, Theresa Shaffer.

+ Alliance Defense Fund, 15333 North Pima Rd., Suite 165, Scottsdale, AZ 85260 (800) TEL-LADF

Presbyterian church to be torn down in Gulfport, Mississippi

Almost exactly 42 years after their church's dedication, about 170 members of the First Presbyterian Church of Gulfport, Mississippi,

held a memorial service before its destruction on 21 January 2007.

According to Tim Murr, a church elder and member since 1983, the church will be demolished sometime in the next three weeks. Murr also stated that the site itself will be sold, even though it is not yet on the market. One of the many reasons they will be unable to return to that spot is the insurance would cost the congregation US\$250,000 per year now, whereas it cost US\$35,00 per year before Hurricane Katrina.

The congregation is currently worshipping at the Bayou View Elementary School gymnasium, but will probably be moving to a new location as soon as it can secure funding.

+ *First Presbyterian Church of Gulfport (PCA), Pastor Richard Guy, 1214 24th Ave., Gulfport, MS 39501 (228) 863-2664*

Tenure-track position denied woman at Baptist seminary

The Dallas Morning news reported on 19 January 2007, that Professor Sheri Klouda, was denied tenure at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2004. Klouda was given a tenure-track position to teach Hebrew in Southwestern's school of theology when she received her Ph.D. at the Forth Worth, Texas, campus in 2002.

Chairman of Southwestern's board of trustees, Van McClain, stated that the seminary has returned to its 'tradition, confessional, and Biblical position' that a woman should not instruct men in theology courses or in Biblical languages.

Klouda, said, 'I don't think it was right to hire me to do this job, to put me in the position where I, in good faith, assumed that I was work-

ing toward tenure, and then suddenly remove me without any cause other than gender.'

Klouda now teaches at Taylor University in Indiana.

+ *Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, PO Box 22000, Ft. Worth, TX 76122 (817) 923-1921*

Presbyterian church in Berkshires ordains first pastor

On 14 January 2007, the ordination of the Berkshire Reformed Presbyterian Mission Church's first pastor, Brent England, was held.

All 20 members of the church were present, as were national representatives of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

England, 30, a former Roman Catholic who grew up on a dairy farm in southern Pennsylvania, arrived in the county in August, when officials saw a need to launch a local mission in the Berkshires.

'This is a satellite church,' England said. 'And this is my first mission as a minister. We're small, but we have a strong commitment to the church and the body of believers.'

+ *Berkshire Reformed Presbyterian Mission Church, Pastor Brent England, (413) 717-1699 <pastor@berkshirepresbyterian.org>*

Virginia Diocese declares church property 'abandoned'

On 18 January the Executive Board of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia authorised Bishop Peter Lee to 'take such steps as may be necessary to recover or secure such real and personal property' of 11 congregations where a majority of the members and leaders have left the Episcopal Church.

Also on 18 January Lee, in a letter to the diocese, wrote that when the majority of the

congregations' membership agreed to leave, 'they left remaining Episcopal congregations in those places without vestries, without clergy, and without their churches, whether the remaining congregations numbered one or 100 souls.'

Lee also wrote, 'The spiritual abandonment of their Episcopal brothers and sisters of the past, the present and the future, is perhaps the greatest offense for which there is no redress under our tradition.'

The 11 congregations (of the 195 in the diocese) where property has been declared abandoned are: Church of the Apostles, Fairfax; Church of the Epiphany, Herndon; Church of our Saviour, Oatlands; Church of the Redeemer, Chantilly; Church of the Word, Gainesville; Potomac Falls Church, Sterling; St. Margaret's, Woodbridge; St. Paul's, Haymarket; St. Stephen's, Heathsville; The Falls Church, Falls Church; and Truro Church, Fairfax.

+ *The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, 110 West Rankin St., Richmond, VA 23220-5095 (804) 643-8451*

Extremist confesses to murder of Christians in Indonesia

An Islamic extremist admitted on 17 January to taking part in the killing of three Christian high school girls in Poso in 2005. Lilik Purnomo also confessed to shooting the Rev. Susiandy Tinulele to death in Palu in 2004. In a written statement in Central Jakarta District Court, Purnomo also confessed to participating in other acts of violence in Poso; a bombing at Immanuel Church; beheading a village chief; and shooting Ferry Silalahi, a Christian attorney who had defended the Rev. Rinaldy Damanik, a Christian peace activist.

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

A feminine focus

*The feminine virtue
of perseverance*

Sally Davey

How often we feel like giving up. Few of us seem to have the capacity to keep going at the same task day in day out, month after month and year after year. We get bored, we get discouraged, we lose heart. Our enthusiasm wanes and our good intentions crumple

into a faded heap, soon to be forgotten as life passes by. What is the matter with us?

It has struck me time and time again that it is a very difficult thing to maintain a steady, disciplined commitment to any task or calling in life. And yet, if God calls us to a task, we need to keep at it. This applies for church members and elders. It applies for

all sorts of callings and ministries, whether preaching to a large congregation or cleaning a sick sister's house. Perseverance is also needed for children – honouring one's parents is a lifelong commitment. It doesn't suddenly stop when we're teenagers and their boundaries get irksome – or when they're old and titchy and difficult, and need our help. It's true for wives. We all know that it's not always fun to be married; and that (in passing moments of frustration) we may feel like writing our autobiography and entitling it Marriage to a Difficult Man. Bringing up children can seem like an endurance test as well. There are times when the struggle to be consistent is like walking a tightrope, when we wonder whether we can handle even one more difficult discussion. There seem to be so many areas of life that require perseverance, yet there are so many ways

in which we feel like simply giving up.

We are all covenant breakers

One certainly doesn't need to be an Einstein to work out that we live in anything but a persevering culture. Evidence abounds at every level of our lives. We crave the instant (in food, travel and personal gratification) and whatever takes time or effort or patience to achieve will soon be forgotten when more easily-attainable rewards beckon. Why walk to work or school when a car is in the garage, and Mum can be persuaded to drive you there? Why go through the pain of a long, slow diet when an operation will end all the angst of teenage obesity? And so on. But while a lack of perseverance sometimes looks like (and is) a Generation Y failing, it is clearly also a problem common to all of human nature since the fall. Why else did the Israelites so quickly forget their deliverance in the Red Sea and start pining for the delicacies of Egypt? Why else did God's people fall into sin again and again – even to the extent of losing their knowledge of His law altogether by the time of Josiah? We are all covenant breakers, and we all lack perseverance.

God knows all this. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, and there are all sorts of ways that a careful study of His Word will help us in our temptation to give up on the work He has for us. Chief among these must be reflecting on the truth that God is already persevering – has already persevered – with us, undeserving sinners though we be. While we were still dead and hopeless He sent His Son to die for us; and the work that He began in our hearts on the day we believed, He is steadfastly continuing. More than that, He will bring it to completion. And so much so that nothing will stand in His way – neither the temptations of the evil one, nor our own weak, vacillating, unworthy selves. I don't know about you, but I find Paul's certainty profoundly reassuring: 'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 1:6) He perseveres with us. And He enables us to persevere: it is His work, from beginning to end. In this same letter to the Philippians Paul urges: 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' (Phil. 2:12-13) The fact that God is at work in us, enabling us to do His will, is such a hopeful thing. How much better to have that truth to rely on, and not merely our own fickleness! Throughout the Scriptures there are many encouragements to keep

going, particularly when the going is tough. Here are some of my favourites: 'The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.' (Lamentations 3:22-3) 'Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.' (Isaiah 40:31) And finally, from Hebrews, the letter whose entire message is about perseverance:

'Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.' (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Reasons for why we give up

Well, what are some of the reasons we all give up — in spite of all the encouragements we have in Christ? The first thing that will come to most of our minds is laziness and lack of motivation. The Proverbs call this sloth — a most descriptive word. The lazy Christian does not put her efforts into Bible study and prayer and the other spiritual disciplines, so she lacks the knowledge, the wisdom and the spiritual weapons with which to fight the spiritual battles that are sure to come her way. She will succumb in these battles — and she will begin to wonder, perhaps, after years of living like this, why the world has crept into so many areas of her life.

Sometimes we seem to get bored — a strange thing for a Christian who has every reason to be excited about all her blessings in Christ — but it happens. We seem to lose our zeal for worship, for the company of other Christians, and we start to criticise everything: the shortcomings of our brothers and sisters, the way we worship, the seeming lack of caring that goes on in our church — in short, everything except ourselves and our own attitudes. But every time I start to think like this (I'm prone to it myself) I hear the words of Christ to the church at Ephesus: 'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember then from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first...' (Revelation 2:4-5) They echo, seriously and convictingly in my mind.

Boredom is no excuse; and when this is our attitude, there is something to repent of.

Sometimes we are persevering, and doing our best to be faithful in our service to Christ. Perhaps we have been active in a particular work, like evangelism in our neighbourhood, or teaching Sunday School. For some reason (God alone knows it) there has been very little fruit for our labour. Maybe one of the neighbours showed a little interest in the gospel at first, but her husband discouraged her. Another moved away after a promising beginning in a Bible study. Perhaps the Sunday school children were rude and uninterested, and their parents wouldn't do anything about it. Perhaps you have another problem. You have studied the Scriptures faithfully and read good teachers of the Word for years, and you know what a church, its worship and its ministries should look like. But your congregation is slipping and sliding inexorably away from biblical standards, and you know it. You've pleaded with your church leaders, but they don't see it. You're disheartened, and you feel like leaving. These are all typical discouragements, and they are the kind of thing that make continuing in Christian service, year after year, very difficult. If it weren't for the clear directives and encouragement of the Word of God himself it would, I think, be impossible.

Spiritual depression

Then there is a particular kind of weariness that may assail us in our middle years. At least, this is what Martyn Lloyd-Jones thought, and it is one of the subjects he wrote about in his book *Spiritual Depression*. This chapter, 'Weary in Well Doing,' is a sermon on Galatians 6:9, 'And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.' (A.V.) Lloyd-Jones begins:

'Now perhaps the best way of looking at this tendency to weariness on our part is to look at it first of all in general. This is what we may call the danger of the middle period. It is something which is true not only in the Christian life as such, it is true of the whole of life. It is the problem of middle age, and, if you like, is something we all have to face sooner or later as we get older. Great attention is being paid to young people today, and a considerable amount of attention is being paid to old people, but I am perfectly convinced that the most difficult period of all in life is the middle period. There are compensations in youth and there are compensations in old age which seem to be entirely lacking in this middle period. It is something we all have to encounter...'

The thrill of the new has gone; and in addition there may be trials (such as the offence caused by other people) that make persevering difficult. So what do we do? Lloyd-Jones is very helpful here. He suggests examining ourselves, and seeing if there be any sin on our part. One such sin is the insult offered to God by thinking of the Christian life as a dreary duty. Another might be the habit of looking for something new in our lives to excite and stimulate us. Another might be trying to numb the pain with alcohol. But maybe the problem is simply that we are physically tired, and need more sleep and to eat more sensibly. Lloyd-Jones's advice is always to return to the truths of Scripture and remind yourself of them. Talk to yourself, as he puts it, and you will be spiritually refreshed.¹ Middle-aged discouragement is no match for the certainties of God's Word!

The example of those who have gone before

When I have thought about the problem of persevering, and tried to isolate the particular things that most help us persevere, I've found that beginning, in the Hebrews 12 way, with the example of those who've gone before, is best. I think it's significant that the writer of Hebrews wrote his most powerful words on perseverance just after he'd finished recounting the stories of many faithful, persevering saints from Israel's history. What he was really saying is that because these saints have kept the faith (often under severe trials), you can too. The God who kept them faithful will keep you faithful too. That is the message. I often take great heart from that truth. It's a reliable principle. And we can make the same application when we study church history as well. Have you ever read the biographies of Christians from the past with that idea in mind?

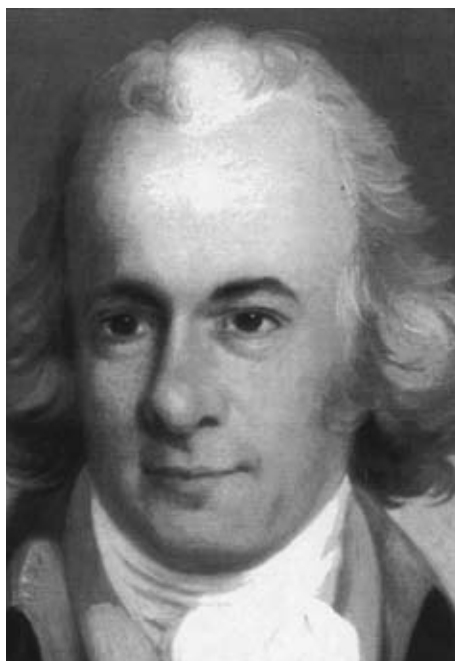
The person who always helps me keep on keeping on is William Wilberforce. You've probably heard of him as the English politician who campaigned against slavery at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. The efforts of Wilberforce and his friends were ultimately successful, but they had to endure an awful lot of abuse, unjust criticism and a wait of thirty years before slavery as an institution was abolished in the British Empire. Here are some of the lessons I've learned about perseverance from Wilberforce, the man, over the years.

A clear conviction

Firstly, to persevere at any task or calling in the Christian life, one needs to have a clear idea of its purpose and importance. This ap-

plies to being married, bringing up children, being an evangelist in your neighbourhood, a missionary in a foreign culture, a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor or a friend. If we are convinced that this task is a good one, a biblical one, one that God would have us do, we can count on His Word to guide us and on His Spirit to encourage us as we do it. If we don't have this conviction, we will begin to doubt, and difficulties will discourage us, even to the point where we're tempted to give up.

Wilberforce grew up in a wealthy, upper-class family. He had the best of educations (Oxford University), and in his early twenties



William Wilberforce

was elected to Parliament. Still a pleasure-loving socialite, he decided to travel the Continent with his former tutor, an evangelical Christian. Wilberforce was converted during this trip, and almost immediately began to rethink his purpose in life. Soon after, following discussions with older friends like John Newton, he came to the conviction that God had set two great purposes before him: the abolition of slavery, and the improvement of morality in the upper classes of England (his own people). He did not come to this conviction lightly — he thought about it carefully, in the light of his responsibilities as a follower of Christ; in the light of the abilities and position God had given him; and in sober consideration of the resources that were available to him. He stuck firmly to these two callings throughout his long life, reminding himself, whenever opposition or long delays threatened to discourage him, that God had set these tasks before him. Do you have clear convictions about the importance of

your calling in life? Are you sure, really sure, that the task you are embarked on is a right and good one; a God-honouring, worthwhile one? If it is, you can absolutely count on God's help in it. Whatever happens, He will see you through, He will encourage you and guide you. He will keep you faithful in it to the end. Don't give up, don't lose heart!

The fellowship of Christian friends

Secondly, God does not leave us alone in our task. He has made us to be part of a body, and He will send us encouragement in the shape of brothers and sisters who will cheer us up, remind us of our purpose, and walk with us in our difficulties when the going gets tough. Wilberforce had an amazing group of friends who all helped in his work. Like him, they were wealthy, articulate and had prominent positions in society. But they had what was much more important: similar convictions about the necessity of the work. Some wrote letters, others spoke in Parliament. One, John Thornton, a wealthy banker, gave a huge proportion of his income to support the work and help those in need, such as paying the debts of debtors who had been sent to prison. Another man tirelessly (and riskily) visited slave ships to gather evidence about the conditions in which slaves were transported. Hannah More wrote pamphlets and books urging more serious, biblical education for girls; and improvements in the morality of the upper classes. All of them met together to talk, pray, discuss the work, and to lift the drooping spirits of those who were discouraged. Wilberforce was very conscious of his need for the fellowship of these friends in his work, and often said that he could not have carried on without them. Who are your encouragers? Do you have friends to turn to when your spirits plummet and you feel unable to carry on? Are you such a friend yourself? Have you ever thought about the importance of being prepared to continue, year after year, in the same Bible study group, for instance? Are you aware of the ways that such faithfulness encourages the others in your group? I have experienced this often; and have one particular friend who could always be counted on to be there, to be enthusiastic, to have done her preparation, and be ready and willing to help others understand the Scriptures and apply them to the troubles in their lives. Conversely, have you ever thought about the discouragement that comes from seeing a person come to a meeting enthusiastically for two or three times, then disappear, never to be seen in the group again? Are you a fly-by-nighter or a perseverer by habit? Consider the effects

on others... But even if you believe you don't have any encouraging fellow-workers in your life right now, turn to the examples of Christians who have walked the road before us. Read about them, read their own words if they wrote books, and treat them as your own personal cloud of witnesses to cheer you on in your race of perseverance.

Having a Christian character

The third thing I've learned from Wilberforce is the lesson of cheerfulness. One of the remarkable things about him was his sweet, gentle character. Wilberforce faced a lot of opposition in his life. At times he was severely criticised, even harshly abused by those whose wealth was gained from slavery. During the height of the French Revolution he was accused of being a revolutionary, and dangerous, because he championed the slaves as fellow human beings, as brothers. But no matter how much ridicule and abuse he and his friends received, he never responded with harshness or similar, cutting criticism. He never returned attack for attack. In fact, he had a reputation for a peculiar sweetness of disposition; and as one of Parliament's greatest orators he was called 'the Nightingale of the House of Commons.' He was not one for harsh and stinging

attacks; his aim was not to demolish his opponents, but to win them over. How easy it is to become grim and determined when campaigning in a difficult cause! When we're besieged on all sides with harsh attacks it is so easy to become hardened, even bitter, as we press on in grim determination. Some Christians have even stooped to using harsh language when attacking the enemies of the gospel. But this will never do. 'Do not return evil for evil,' Jesus told us. 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.' Remember that these enemies are slaves to sin, and do not know any better.

But perhaps your 'enemies' are close to home, even in your home. This can be hard, really hard. Perseverance in this kind of daily battle is one of the most difficult tests of faith in this life. Are you having struggles in your marriage, or with your children? How do you maintain a sweet and loving disposition in the face of daily onslaughts of anger, coldness, or unbelief from those nearest and dearest to you? It seems to me that the only way to walk on this path is to pray for God's daily and hourly grace; grace to find the gentle word that turns away wrath, grace to resist the angry or hurt reply, grace to hold back accusation and criticism; grace, at times, simply to say nothing except silent

words of prayer to God. This is the grace that God gives freely and wonderfully — and it is such grace that gives Him great glory when shown in our weakness. Remember what Peter wrote to wives who had to live with unbelieving husbands: 'be submissive... so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives — when they see your respectful and pure conduct.' (1 Peter 3:1-2) Do you remember Monica, the mother of the great theologian, Augustine, who patiently persevered with a violent, angry husband and an immoral, rebellious son? God rewarded her faithful conduct with the conversions of both her husband and her son. She saw these before she died.

Where do your encouragements lie? Who are your cloud of witnesses? Find them in the truth of the Scriptures, and among the hosts of faithful Christians whose lives of faith beckon us on. Remember, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He will make us, like them, more than conquerors. Persevere.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 191-202.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Family prayer & praise items: We praise God with and for the Alexander family as on Monday night they received the gift of a new baby girl, Amelia Lilac, who weighed in at 9lb14oz and is 'simply gorgeous' according to mum.

Family announcements: Andrew Nugteren. Last week, we enjoyed meeting Andrew, Lydia and Devlin Nugteren. During their weekend with us, they visited the Discipleship class, met with a group at Pinesong, attended a barbecue and informative meeting with members of Session and mingled during the shared lunch on Sunday afternoon. Andrew even spent a little while observing the Niuean service. The elders were impressed with Andrew and have set Sunday 10 December as

the date for a short congregational meeting to decide whether a call should be extended to him. The meeting will be after the morning service. In accordance with our usual practice, 75% or more of the votes cast must be in favour. Please remember this matter, and the Nugteren family, in your prayers.

Building Project: At the AGM, we accepted the basic concept for a new hall and admin block and charged the Board of Management to explore funding options. Suggestions for certain modifications to the plans were made during the meeting. At their November meeting, Session received a report on the work done by the BoM since the AGM. A joint approach was discussed with Immanuel Christian School but it now appears to be impractical as the school's requirements will need a site larger than we have available. With the modifications priced in, the building cost is expected to be approx \$754,000. This costing is an estimate based on preliminary drawings. Furniture, furnishings and whiteware for the new buildings will add to the project cost. Immanuel Christian School is willing to pay a rental to use the new hall, which will reduce our outgoings. Approval has been received from the Church

Extension Committee for a low interest loan of \$60,000. An application for a grant will be made at a later date. Session decided to seek congregational approval for the project at a congregational meeting to be held this Wednesday 29 November when a full presentation will be made. Please mark the date in your diary.

Notes from the Session meeting: The following young people met with Session last Wednesday prior to publicly professing their faith: Hayley Armstrong, Courtney Bearman, Samuel Bos, Marike Breytenbach, Ben Goris, Glenn Jefferies, Kimberley Steenhuis, and Yvonne ter Veen. Nick Hunt was unable to attend and will meet with the elders on 20 December. The Profession of Faith Service will take place DV January 21, 2007.

Family prayer & praise items: Next Sunday DV we will have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of Zoe Meinsma and Amelia Alexander. Please pray for these families as they seek to bring up their children in God's ways.

Wedding banns: Congregation, Eloisa Heeringa and Justin Hagoort indicate their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the

Reformed Church of Avondale, 27th of January 2007 at 1pm. We welcome the congregation to witness this beginning of their life together in the name of the Lord, and to celebrate with afternoon tea after the ceremony.

Bishopdale

Pastoral: In last week's bulletin, I mentioned that we would "pursue calling Pieter van Huyssteen." Due to feedback received, it may be useful to clarify what that means. The Session has decided that we should work towards calling Pieter. This is not only due to our own interaction with him but also on the basis of strong endorsements received from others which we consider weighty. Pieter may be asked to come down again after his exam, and then the congregation will be asked to vote on the matter. However, in this and in everything else, we say, "If the Lord wills."

Bucklands Beach

Pastoral. On Wednesday morning (Nov 22, 2006) the Lord called home brother Ivan Ferguson. Bud and most members of the family were at his bedside at the time. He left this life peacefully and in full assurance of the promises which had shaped every moment of his life. Our sincerest sympathy is hereby expressed to Bud and the family. May the testimony of your husband, father, grandfather and brother in Christ continue to shine as an example and encouragement to us all. In the absence of our pastor, it was a very special privilege that a former pastor of our congregation, the Rev Tom E Tyson, was able and willing to conduct that service. His ties to the family goes right back to the early 1960s.

Pastoral. It is with thanksgiving to our Lord that we can inform you that Michael Willemse has accepted a call to the congregation in Hamilton. His ordination is likely to be around mid February. We will keep you informed.

Next Sunday (DV) we will celebrate the sacrament of Baptism with the baptism of Elisabeth Violette Geldart, daughter of Justin and Ingrid. May the Lord bless this special moment. In celebration we will have a morning tea after the service next Sunday, so could we ask that everyone please bring a plate.

Pastoral. Next Sunday morning will be a special one in the life of our fellowship. Ronel Schodt as a member and her husband Carl have asked for their daughter Hayley to be baptised. At the same time Ronel and Carl, who were married in a civil ceremony under difficult conditions in Zimbabwe some years ago, have asked to be able to make and seal their marriage vows before God and his people and seek his blessings. This too is planned for the service next Sunday. You are invited to bring a plate for a small celebration after that service.

Christchurch

Report From the Session Meeting Held 29 November, 2006 We were informed that sr. Tini Mulder is retiring from her work as Calvinette Counsellor after some 27 years of service. We

would like to thank her for her dedicated work for this ministry!

Dovedale

Pastoral. Our time in Australia was very blessed. It was great working with the students and staff at the RTC and the response was very encouraging. I still have part of an exam to mark when I receive it by post. In relation to the possible call from Canberra, the congregation decided to call the other man on the duo - Rev. Peter Gadsby from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. Thanks for your prayer during that period of unsettlement - MF.

Wedding celebration. Nathanael and Marielle are going to exchange their vows at 1:30pm on the 16th of December at St Andrew's Church which is located on 14 Merivale Lane. Please come and celebrate this joyous occasion with us.

Dunedin

Nelson Camp Report. Two weekends ago, Lydia and I drove up to Nelson to lead a camp for the Nelson congregation. To keep the costs down, the 'camp' ended up being an all-day affair at the church and so everyone on 'camp' was able to enjoy the comforts of their own beds! The topic for the seminar I led was "As you think, so you are" looking at the importance of the way we think as Christians. Part of our growing in Christ is to have our minds transformed (Romans 12:2), to develop a Christian worldview (a way of looking at the world) and so honour Christ in every area of life. In the afternoon, we broke into discussion groups to consider how to think Christianly about the environment, education and our children, our vocations and how what we had been thinking about was related to sharing our faith with others who share different worldviews.

After the seminar talks and discussion, we also had a number of team activities that someone had organised, including how many times your team could drive a child's tricycle around a figure-8 course in 10 minutes and an indoor game of shuffleboard. The youth club cooked dinner for the congregation as a fundraiser for the upcoming national youth camp, and then we finished the evening with a number of different items that members of the congregation shared.

Overall, we had a great weekend meeting the Nelson congregation, visiting their church for the first time and leading their worship services. It's been 10 years since their new church building was completed and it has been a wonderful, modern facility for them to use. In many ways, the Nelson congregation, as a smaller church, is rather like our own congregations in Dunedin and Oamaru. Many of their young people move away for study or work and so numbers are always up a little, and then down again. It's disappointing when people have to leave to find work. Yet they are united in the Lord's work, and in the challenge, both for them and for us, to make Christ known in the community. Andrew Nugteren

Question and Answer Evening. Our thanks to Dr Leon Dittrich, Rev Hans Vaatstra and Mr Andrew

Nugteren for forming a panel and providing a most engrossing and informative evening last Thursday. Thanks also to Peter Schinkelshoek who chaired the meeting. Medical questions seemed to be a particular theme for discussion. Dr Dittrich gave us plenty to think about with regards to organ donation, fertility treatments, and the links between alternative medicine and pagan religion. We also heard about the beginning of creation, Bible translations, corporate prayer practice, and of an episode in which the Old Testament ceremonial law was broken. Perhaps an evening like this could become an annual event. If you consider it worth doing again please let your elder or home group leader know so that Session can gauge the likely interest. It may be a good idea too to start noting down potential questions for next time.

Foxton

Birthday invitation: An invitation is extended to all who would like to come and help celebrate Harry van Echten's 80th birthday. The celebration will be held at the Masonic Village Café, Queen St, Levin, on Thursday 14th December from 3.30pm - 7.30pm. The Family

Calling process: Session have appointed John Dykstra, Allan Thomson and Roy Nugteren as a Calling Committee. Others will probably be added in the New Year. We seek the input of the congregation. If you have any ideas, information or helpful suggestions regarding the calling of a new minister, please speak to one of the above brothers. Thank you.

Hamilton

Wedding Banns: Hayden Bosgra and Jessica Jones have signified their desire to be united in marriage in this church, the Reformed Church at 9 Aberdeen Drive, on Saturday 9th December 2006. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on that date, starting at 1.00pm. Hayden and Jessica say: "All are invited to attend!".

Hastings

From the library. There are some brand spankin' new books in the library especially for you children. Two of them, Ten Boys Who Made a Difference and Ten Girls Who Made a Difference, both by Irene Howat, are really neat little books with stories about men and women who made a difference in their homes, churches and consequently, the world. I must say, I'm very impressed with these little books, especially because of the selection of people in them. Between them, there are stories of Augustine, John Calvin, Lord Shaftesbury, Katherine Luther, Edith Schaeffer and Sabina Wurmbraam, just to name a few. Each chapter also has a few extra facts and questions to think about. It's a great way to help children think about how they should act.

From the Pastor. The session was pleased to hear the testimony of three of our youth: Adele Ford, Daniel Heesterman, and Marcia Verbokkem. Session has granted them permission to make a public profession of their faith, D.V., on Sunday,

10 December. If anyone has a lawful objection against any of these making their public profession of faith, please speak to the pastor or your elder as soon as possible so that your objection can be fully considered.

REFORMED CHURCH OF HASTINGS WEB SITE. Bonnie van Seventer has been hard at work laying out some web pages for our church. You can find them at <http://hastings.rcnz.org.nz> where you will find information about our beliefs, our location, links to many Reformed sites and the last 8 months of sermons preached here. These are in audio (mp3) format which you can either download for later listening or listen directly while you are connected to the internet. I know that there is a lot of bad stuff on the internet. There is also a lot that is good. There is a lot of Reformed stuff out there in cyberspace. Everything from sermons, to Reformed books, to Bible studies. The big question is how to find it. Well, here is a place to begin: <http://www.covenant-urc.org/links/refwebs.html>. On that page you will find a list of links to many different Reformed web sites. For example Abraham Kuyper's lectures on Calvinism, several Reformed magazines online, sermons by Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Maurice Roberts and many other Reformed ministers, Calvinistic worldview material, theological and biblical studies, evangelistic materials, church history, Reformed seminaries and colleges, books by Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, John Gill, John Bunyan, John Calvin (lots of Reformed theologians were named John), and even the "Nederlands Dagblad" which translated means the Netherlands Daily Newsheet. Oh, there are also some online Reformed radio broadcasts and even some pages devoted to Reformed Art and Music. But I didn't find any Reformed mathematics pages! Pity, that. So now you can't complain that you don't any good reformed web sites.

From the Pastor. We rejoice with Anthony and Petra on the safe delivery and birth of a healthy baby, Hannah Rose Lagas. Anthony and Petra, may the Lord give you wisdom and strength for the calling he has given you in training your children for Him.

Hukanui

Wedding Banns: Hayden Bosgra and Jessica Jones have indicated their desire to be married in the Lord. The ceremony will take place, DV, on Saturday 9th December, at 1:00 p.m. at the Reformed Church of Hamilton, 11 Aberdeen Drive, with the Rev J Haverland officiating. May God bless your wedding day and your life together.

Mangere

Pastoral. Today you will be given a paper in connection with a special Congregational Meeting to be held following next Sunday morning's worship service. This is to consider having Daniel Wilson, a ministry student in the Presbyterian Church in America, serving a 3 month internship as part of his studies and also as part of their plans to serve later in the ministry in our denomination. We need to have the meeting now before the

summer break so that plans can be confirmed and tickets booked.

Masterton

Ladies prayer meeting. This Monday night we will come together for a time of singing and praying, the last time this year. We give thanks to the Lord for this past year. If you want us to bring something before God's holy throne or join us, please feel welcome to do that. Please note the different time. Regards Jennie, on behalf.

Pastoral notes. This morning we have the privilege of witnessing the sacrament of baptism administered to Jack James Kloeg. We pray for this covenant child and his family as they learn to fear and serve the Lord together.

A note from the Landkroons: A word of thanks is rather inadequate to express our appreciation to the congregation for the following during my stay in Auckland. The many cards all so personally written are very touching, the gifts, (especially those sent for my birthday), the phone calls, the meals supplied to my family, and most of all the prayer support. It's all very overwhelming for us all. The Lord has been very gracious in giving me such a remarkable, speedy recovery from the Liver transplant, without any major complications or rejection that I hope to be returning home at the end of next week. As you all know the family have been a wonderful strength and support and I admire Tessa for her loyalty, love, skills and perseverance through this big trial she has experienced in her young life. (As goes for all the family) So now we look forward to one week with the family in Auckland, the freezer is full of meals supplied by people from the church. So, thank you so much everyone, Much love from Tracy and family.

Wedding Banns. Chris Robert Martin and Alexandra Bethilde (Sandra) Stolte have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the wedding will take place, the Lord willing, this Friday the 19th of January. May the Lord grant this couple grace to fulfil the vows they will make before God and men, and enable Chris and Sandra in their relationship to reflect the relationship and communion between Christ and His church.

North Shore

From the deacons - One of the areas that we would like to become involved in is our role outside the church. That is in the local area around us, or the wider community. Crossroad Bible Institute is one possible vehicle for this role. This is a ministry to prison inmates. It involves volunteering to become an instructor. You would be required to mark Bible study lessons completed by inmates and return them with personal letters of discipleship. There are pamphlets in the foyer with more information. If you are interested please contact Martyn or Wayne.

Profession of faith. At our pastoral meeting on Thursday night, we were visited by Michael Posthuma with a request to profess his faith in

Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and take up communicant membership in the Church. We had a good discussion with Michael and were very pleased to accede to his request. Lord willing, that will take place on Sunday, 10th December. If anyone believes he has any lawful objection to Michael professing his faith please make that known to your elder and we will consider it.

The funny side of neo-paganism. I couldn't help noticing a couple of giveaway signs of the growing paganism in our society last week. The first was at the Creation versus Evolution debate between Paul Rainey, Professor of Ecology & Evolution at Auckland University, and John Mackay, International Director of Creation Research, hosted by the North Harbour Community Christian Church.

*We give thanks to God
that we were able to celebrate the*

50th Wedding Anniversary

of our parents and grandparents

Harmen & Ann DYKSTRA



**Married in Wellington,
22nd December 1956**

Eric & Andre (Tauranga)

Max & Sylvia (Auckland)
Susan, Andrew

John (Auckland)

Harry & Karin (Foxton)
Christopher, Paula, Philip, Sarah

Paul (Foxton)

**P.O. Box 46
Foxton**

Full marks to Paul Rainey for fronting up to a polite audience but one, which pretty predictably did not take his position, not to mention a very capable opponent! Perhaps Prof. Rainey thought he better doff his hat, at least, at the idea of worship, allow some room for God somewhere, or whatever. At any rate, he made the remark that he didn't think his position was any less "reverential." What he didn't specify was "reverential" to what? Given his position, it is hard not to conclude reverential to the creation in some way. Read Romans 1:22-23.

The other was a chap who took a flight over one of

these icebergs off the coast of the South Island. Wouldn't mind seeing them myself. But this chap said that when he landed on one of them, "It was a very emotional moment for me, I was almost in tears." Oh my! Over a block of frozen H₂O! As GK Chesterton said, "When man gives up believing in God, he doesn't believe in nothing. He believes in anything!" And, apparently, worships anything, even something melting beneath one's feet! After all, you couldn't exactly sing, "On Christ, the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." Not much of a religion methinks.

I've also been thinking about the fact that, we are told; this is the first time icebergs have been seen from mainland New Zealand in seventy-five years. If their appearance is a sure and infallible sign of global warming, as we are told, what happened to the great disaster of which they were, presumably, portents in 1931? Not to mention the approaching global freeze we were all warned about midway between then and now. Oh dear, it's hard getting it right when you play god!
JR

Palmerston North

Congratulations to Mrs Johansen who celebrated her 80th birthday last week! Please stay after the morning service and join us in a coffee to celebrate this occasion with her.

We have the privilege and the blessing of witnessing and taking part in the baptism of Dominic de Vries this morning. He will receive the sign and seal of God's covenant love in the administration of the sacrament. We pray for the Lord's richest blessings for Dominic and his parents, Sam and Dalena, as they raise him for the Lord.

For those who knew him, Klaas Runia, former Professor of the Reformed Theological College in Australia, died on 14 October 2006 at 80 years of age.

Congratulations to Darrell and Jo Nepia and family on the birth of their new son, Victor last Sunday! Victor was born five weeks early and has been in the neonatal unit since his birth but is doing well. We pray our Lords poured out blessings on your family and his strength and guidance as you raise Victor and the rest of your children for Him.

Today we have the privilege and joy of witnessing the Profession of Faith of three of our covenant children, Daniel Rademaker, Jessica Rademaker and Kerry Dykstra. We thank our Lord that He has brought you all to this point in your Christian walk, and know that He is a faithful God and will continue to bless you as you serve Him.

Calling Committee Update. The Session and Calling committee are continuing to explore leads on the calling of a pastor. We have been in contact with Rev Jack Sawyer for some time now and have been encouraged by the contact and feedback received thus far. We are planning to invite Rev Sawyer and his wife, to Palmerston North with a view to a call. The advantages of Rev Sawyer include that he well knows the situation in NZ, he is a very capable preacher of the Word, and has that kind of experience which age usually brings!

We realise that Rev Sawyer may be known to many of you and would thus would welcome any congregational feedback prior to his visit. Leo de Vos has recommended a young minister by the name of Rev Daniel Kok of Canada OCRC. He may well be prepared to come and serve for several months so we would have a good chance to appraise him. We have also had some contact with Rev William van der Woerd, also recommended by Leo, who is currently serving the URC of Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada, and has been there for nine years. This morning's sermon was written by Rev van der Woerd.

Calling Committee. The Session and Calling Committee have invited Rev Michael Flinn to minister the Word to us on Sunday 21 January and to meet with the congregation and session. This is Wellington anniversary weekend so we encourage as many as possible to be here. Many of you will remember Michael from when he was on a duo with Chris Kavanagh and although he did not receive a call at that time he made a very good impression at the time - many of us still recall the sermon he preached! Michael is an experienced Minister and has served in Pukekohe as a home missionary, then pastor for ten years as well as the last nine years in Dovedale. He is 48 and he and his wife Tina have five children between the ages of 16-25, two of whom are married. We had been aware as a committee Rev Michael has been having some talks with Geelong and for this reason we deemed not to consider him earlier. While this remains a strong possibility, it will probably not be for at least three years. Michael was converted during his teenage years. He attended university and completed a Masters in English before studying by Correspondence for the ministry with a South African University. He served as an elder at North Shore Church during this time. Michael is a gifted preacher and teacher and we look forward to meeting with him in January.

Pukekohe

Profession of faith: It gives us joy to announce that Steven Voschezang will profess his faith next Sunday, 17 December, in the morning service. Michael Willemse will lead this service, which will be very appropriate as Steven will be transferring his membership to the Reformed Church of Hamilton where Michael will be his new pastor.

The gospel of John:

Of the 1000 days of Christ's ministry John writes about only 20 of them.

One third of the book deals with one 24-hour period (chapters 13-18).

John omits the narratives of Christ's birth, baptism, transfiguration and parables.

He shows us the personal and intimate ministry of Jesus to individuals. e.g. Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, the disciples.

He gives us the marvellous declarations of the deity of Christ in the seven "I Am" statements contained in this gospel.

On Saturday the 6th of January 2007
the Lord took to Himself
at the age of 65

Hans Voschezang



beloved husband of Hermien and
loved father and grandfather of

Bill & Jacqui Voschezang

-Alida and Elise

René & Lisa

-Rhys and Raquel

Jacqui & Robert Kuik

-Saskia, Monique, Alex & Olivia

*"For as high as the heavens are above
the earth, so great is His loving-kind-
ness for those that fear Him."*

Psalms 103:11

**2 Landon Place
Pukekohe 2120**

He writes in the simplest vocabulary and most concise sentences yet lays out the most profound truths of the Scriptures.

From the pastor: This week I heard someone quote another pastor who warned his congregation of the danger of holidays when the summer break came around. I want to pick up that thought. Holidays can be well used to refresh us and give us time to gather strength for another year of work and service. But this extra time can also be wasted on frivolous and unproductive activities. Now that many of the church meetings have almost finished let's be sure that we continue to read the Scriptures for ourselves, to pray, and to attend worship. The quieter evenings may give you time to read some Christian books – check out the church library for some good titles. If you are going away, look for another church to worship in; we are commanded to worship the Lord with His people on the Lord's Day, even though their services may be different from ours. May these quieter months give you spiritual and physical strength for another year of service.

Session report of the planning meeting – 5 December 2006. A request from Grace Theological College for John Haverland to go on the board was approved on the condition that it be for one year and then be evaluated. The Session thought there was merit in seeking closer links with GTC.

Wedding Invitation. It is with joy that we announce the wedding of Roelof Voschezang and Joanna Haverland (DV) at 10am on the 20th of January at Franklin Baptist Church, 128 Victoria St West, Pukekohe. All are welcome to attend this joyous occasion.

Silverstream

Session Notes. Profession of Faith: Session is pleased to announce that four young people, having been examined by the elders as to their doctrine and life, are now recommended for profession of faith: Kirsty Lambers; Matthew Landkroon; Elza van der Werff; and Emma van der Werff. The profession of faith is to take place, Lord willing, in the morning service of December 17. If anyone in the congregation has any objections,

please let your elder know as soon as possible. Covenant Baptism. We have the privilege of witnessing the covenant of baptism of Asher Johannes, son of Jos and Lauren Knol this afternoon, Lord willing. May the Lord bless the vows that you make today and give you grace and wisdom to bring Asher up, along with your other children, in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

Wellington

Re-affirmation of faith...In this morning's service Johanna Stump will re-affirm her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice with her in taking this stand. The Lord has been good in bringing her into our fellowship and feeling more and more at home, but above all in coming to know her Lord better.

Call extended. At last Sunday's congregational meeting bro. Andrew Nugteren was called to be the new minister for our Wellington Church. Pray for him and his family as they consider this, and possibly other calls, during the next few weeks.

To jump or not to jump

Jono Termaat

The Christian music festival, Parachute, celebrated 16 years of existence during Auckland's recent anniversary weekend.

Parachute Christian music festival boasts a large variety of music genres, stalls, food stalls, motorcross, carnival rides and speakers from around the world. Last year more than 23 000 people stayed over the entire weekend in the spacious Mystery Creek Events Centre, just outside Hamilton. Originally set up as a weekend for Christian bands to play together, it's focus is now largely on evangelism. Parachute is inter-denominational with bands and speakers coming from varying organisations and churches, including AOG, Catholic, New Life, Harvest Christian Centre and more.

I have attended Parachute on a number of occasions in previous years. Over the last few years a group of youth from our Churches have organised a place for our youth to stay together over the weekend. This provides them with a place of rest, a hot meal and most importantly, an opportunity to discuss the various teachings and music that are heard at Parachute.

There are many positive aspects to the festival that are worth mentioning. It pro-

vides great opportunities for evangelism and talking with people about their eternal life. There is a focus on God there that creates opportunities to talk with youth who may be searching. There are many musicians who have an obvious focus on God and his Word, as well as others who are more questionable in their theology and lyrics. We must not question the motives of the people running

the event as I believe that they sincerely want sinners to come to repentance and to turn to God. Even if we do not fully agree with the methods, it's true that God can use a crooked stick to make a straight path.

The negatives of Parachute

We cannot write Parachute off as an ineffective tool for evangelism. God can and



will use it, if it is His will. But we need to ask ourselves, 'Am I aware of the influences and struggles that I am exposing myself or my children to, while at Parachute? Am I responsible and strong enough in my faith to be discerning?'

I wrote this article a year ago, but after speaking with some parents, I felt that some examples needed mentioning to help better understand the environment.

A common misconception of Parachute is that because it is a 'Christian' music festival, it is a 'good' environment. (Don't be fooled: not all the girls wear their skirts an inch below the knee.) My intention in this article is not to mar the name of Parachute or those who pour endless hours into its production, but to better inform parents.

With so many people attending, the task of policing an event like this is complicated and difficult. Not all who attend are Christian or even pretend to be. People are removed from the venue every year for possession of drugs or alcohol. Although it does not compare to a non-Christian music festival, drugs are still present and easily found.

Two years ago the Sunday service was a Roman Catholic mass. The problem here is that there are obvious differences between what Scripture teaches and some practices of the Roman Catholic church. These differences were the whole reason for the Reformation. The defense of the truths of Scripture should not be compromised for the 'unity of the saints' (i.e. inter-denominational union).

On another occasion there was 'Communion' for those gathered around one of the stages. Everyone was instructed to break into groups, then Coke and bread were brought around to those seated. How should we respond to this? Why do we practice Communion the way we do in our Churches? Why do we restrict it to those who have publicly professed Christ crucified for their transgressions? Communion is a sign and symbol of Christ's sacrifice and if we do not understand and accept that sacrifice, how can we have communion?

The need to think biblically

We decided not to take part. One of the reasons we gave was that the Church should have the responsibility of administering the Sacraments properly. Scripture is very clear about the requirements of administering the Sacraments. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul states that each man should examine himself before coming to the table. He also states that anyone who does not recognise the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement

on himself. That responsibility lies with the individual, but also with those overseeing. There are many good reasons for the way we as churches administer the Sacraments.

One other occasion was a 'worship' DJ from the UK, spurring the crowd to 'fly with God' and running around on stage as if he had wings. Midway through a song with music and lights he started 'praying.' The experience seemed irreverent to say the least, and reminded me of the prophets of Baal winding themselves up for a response from their god. Perhaps I exaggerate. But when we come before God, we should come humbly and in quietness. Why? Because we recognise our position before our Great and Awesome God. When we pray we are talking with this God. We can learn a lot from the response of Job when God responded to his questions of suffering. I wonder how well we understand how great God is, and what He has done for us? I am not criticising the intentions of this musician, but surely the way we approach our God should come out of a deep respect and fear of Him.

It is primarily this exposure to different teachings, whether through preaching or music, that persuaded me to write encouraging parents to be more aware of what their children are exposed to at Parachute. There are obvious inter-denominational differences present at Parachute. Pastors bring differing theological arguments into their topics and preaching that do make a difference, and need to be examined in light of Scripture. Discernment is needed when listening to these speakers. I want to encourage parents to be more aware of these aspects of

Parachute when sending their children there, particularly if they have younger youth with more impressionable minds and without a strong faith. It would be highly beneficial for you as parents to visit Parachute with them. Mark De Jong, the organiser of the event, has stated that parents should not be ignorant of what does unfortunately happen at Parachute, and encourages them to come with their children. There may even be a need to restrict this environment to those who can be discerning, at least for a time.

'Christian' can be a label

The argument surrounding what 'Christian' music is acceptable and what is not will not come to an end. (If music has Christian lyrics, does that make the music God-honouring? Or does the genre also reflect what is Christian or not?) We must be aware of what our children listen to and the teachings that they are exposed to, especially music at Parachute under the guise of Christianity. A band labelled 'Christian' is not necessarily God-honouring.

Each and every one of us is exposed to false teaching and worldly ideas which we must bring before God's Word: we must examine all things in light of Scripture.

I hope that this will be beneficial to parents with this responsibility and that it will make you more aware of the need to be present with your children while at Parachute, aware of the music they listen to and the need for teaching them discernment.

Jonathan Termaat is a member of the Reformed Church of Hukanui

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir,

In response to Alice Saathof's criticism of my review of *Safely Home*: I am guilty as charged of presenting a view rather than a review, and it certainly was one-sided. However, I think these matters merit discussion, and there is no more room for complacency on one side than on the other. We human beings have such a remarkable talent for identifying a problem or need, setting up a system to deal with it, and then satisfying ourselves that the problem has been taken care of, regardless of whether or not the system we have set in place is achieving anything whatsoever.

Alice Saathof's description of life in ancient Israel may be accurate, although I do

not know of any example of apprenticeship in the Old Testament, unless one considers the unique case of Samuel (can anyone correct me on this?). But it must be asked what basis there is for supposing that the population was largely illiterate, or that instruction in letters could not have taken place in the average home. Does any ancient document support such a view? Indeed, much in the Scriptures appears to assume full literacy. The injunction to "write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:9) is addressed to all of God's people, not just a literate elite. A husband who divorced his wife wrote a certificate of divorce and put it in her hand (Deut. 24:1).

Joshua (Jos. 8:32) obeyed God's command through Moses (Deut. 27) to write out the words of the Law on large whitewashed stones - what for, if not for people to read them? Of course most people didn't have a Bible or a shelf of books before the printing press was invented, but learning to read and write a language with a straightforward alphabet is not actually a big deal.

Our situation today is far more different from that which the Reformers faced, when people had been deliberately kept in ignorance for centuries. New Zealand has had universal compulsory schooling for nearly 120 years, and the literacy rate today is not much higher than it was before, so the argument for schools for the sake of literacy seems fairly passé. We live in a day when an unfathomable ocean of information is available to anyone who knows how to access it. We simply don't need lumbering institutions gobbling up money to teach children a few things anyone could find out. Yes, we should all be using our gifts to serve the body of Christ - not to serve redundant systems. Anyway, that's what I'm trying to do, and I do realize that others are too.

*In Christ,
Tani Newton*

CRISIS in the RCNZ...

I read with interest the article in Nov FIF by John Haverland regarding length of stay for a minister. For me the most telling statement in this article was in his concluding comments where John referred to a "critical shortage of Pastors".

While I tend to agree with longer terms, the critical NZ shortage is a far more pressing issue and seems to provide a whole set of conflicting pressures in terms of needy/vacant congregations and how much responsibility a longer serving man may feel towards vacant pulpits etc.

We have only 19 Pulpits and yet currently we have 7 or so vacancies (Avondale, Wanganui, Palmerston North, Foxton and Christchurch, a second minister at Bishopdale and a possible preaching post at Oamaru). Reading the 2006 RCNZ Year book the denomination has lost around 55 or so ministers over the last 50 years - on average around 1 man per year leaves the NZ denomination (only a handful to retire). Sadly the exiting numbers seem to be increasing (in the last 12 months another 5 ministers have left the RCNZ (Reverends Klazinga, Zuidema, Milne, Goris, Ter Horst)

With such a shortage and more impor-

tantly a continuing and increasing exodus of Ministers, the future of the RCNZ Churches looks a bit bleak. Churches which have an evangelistic outlook/plan/idea, either looking to grow by adding to the ministry team within a congregation or by considering a church planting work are now competing with established congregations which have vacant pulpits. This puts any Minister in a difficult position when considering calls to vacant churches, to put the needs of the faithful at a vacant church ahead of those who already have a minister.

This situation will continue to have a detrimental effect of the number of members in the RCNZ, Congregations who have no minister will always lose members to congregations (inside or outside our denomination) who have ministers. Congregations with plans will be unable put them into practice due to the lack of a minister.

This is therefore a crisis and RCNZ has to face this issue quickly. Why are we short of Ministers ?

While a traditional response has been to suggest we need to send more men for training for the ministry, I believe the first and most important question is,

Why are we losing ministers at an alarming rate from the RCNZ?

Without a counting all the numbers I sense there are two main categories of "lost to the RCNZ" ministers the first being the far and away the most common.

1. Lost back to their home countries (I'm sure with many and varied reasons) and I don't think there is any simple way to prevent this. That is why I believe it is most important we concentrate on NZers for the RCNZ, The expectation we can call men from around the world is a little naive, and we need to wake up to this and concentrate in NZ. (we also face the continuing reality that NZers have found the call to Australian churches irresistible)
2. Lost to the RCNZ because of Congregational or Circumstances. This is where we must support our men and provide better opportunities for help when things are not going well.

So how do we stop the declining number of Ministers and begin to increase the number in the RCNZ. ?

The Solution, I believe, to this crisis is

Wellington Women's Presbytery Meeting

**Reformed Church of Masterton
Saturday 17 March 2007
From 10:00 am**

*Our Guest Speaker is Renton McLachlan
who will be speaking on ...*

Christians and Planet Earth: *How should we treat our home?*

Afternoon Workshops – choose one from the following three:

- **Companion Gardening/Organic Solutions**
- **Crafts using recycled materials**
- **Publicizing our christian views**

*There will be a Bring and Buy, so bring along any produce
or good quality 2nd hand clothing (priced already)*

Any inquiries: Annette.kleinjan@harvest.com

Rosalind Cressy 06 378 7013

Look forward to seeing you there.

found in a two fold approach.

1. Ministry Team

- Firstly as a denomination (read individual congregation if you like, but remember when one congregation loses a minister, he is often lost to all RCNZ congregations) we need to provide a Church environment where Ministers are sufficiently supported with resources for both themselves and their work so that all the work they can see needs doing can be done, as well as having time and energy to take a heads up look around. A church where the minister is happy and appreciated with plenty of support for his ministry will be more likely to retain him than where the minister is overwhelmed with work which he cannot find time or resource to do, as well as not having full support for his ministry.
- The increasing busyness of all of our lives compared with 40 years ago has placed unreasonable demands on a small number of volunteer office bearers in some congregations who are often unable to devote sufficient time and provide sufficient support and help for any minister in his work.
- The size of a congregation contributes to the work a Minister and we should set guidelines on sizes and teams that will

be suggested for different sized congregations.

- The complexities of today's world means it is unreasonable for us to expect one minister to have the vast array of knowledge and talent required for any congregation. (This is especially important when we think of receiving converts into our congregation.)
 - Therefore we need to consider how ministry teams can be formed and used in such a way that we create environments where ministers want to be involved. I do not believe all team members need to be Ministers.
- #### 2. Home Grown Ministry Team Members
- Very few Men who are not New Zealanders accept a call to NZ and those that do often return after a short time back to their country of origin, or worse, find the RCNZ environment/culture detrimental to their ministry and they are then lost to the ministry altogether. Therefore we should concentrate on New Zealanders for our Ministry teams. Furthermore I suggest that we should even localise this approach further by making congregations responsible for their own leadership, By this I mean we should expect to look and find Ministry Teams within

each of our own congregations/regions.

- We should encourage and expect leadership within each congregation by programs such as internships, as well as considering men who are not qualified as ministers to also be part of these ministry teams.
- We should look quickly at how we can start to build NZers into each congregation ministry team, this needs some effort as it moves away from the RCNZ traditional approach and will create a number of questions.

In summary I write with a long held love for the RCNZ and a genuine concern that we have now reached a crisis. While these thoughts are a bit random and brief I trust they communicate my reasons for suggesting we have reached a crisis and secondly my humble thoughts on what we can do.

As members of the denomination we cannot expect the ministers to resolve this crisis. It must come from the membership and we all need to face up the issue of lack of Ministers.

The future of the RCNZ denomination is dependent on Ministers.

*Yours in Christ
Peter Mahoney*

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Caring for returning missionaries

'Bill' was a missionary who had recently returned to his home country. Members of his church attended a missions conference where author Neal Pirolo gave an impassioned plea for the congregation to care for their returning missionaries. There was plenty of enthusiastic agreement about the need to do so...but then came supper, at different people's homes.

Bill was invited to a friend's home and asked to play a video he had brought — but not until after the football game was finished. Bill's video showed the remains of the village where he had been working, after rebel and government forces had fought their way

through, destroying nearly everything in their wake. Praise the Lord, there was no loss of life for Bill's family — not like last time.

After the video there was a moment of silence, as the tape was rewound and returned to Bill, then the first question came:

"What brand of coffee is this? It's really good!"¹

Are you surprised — or shocked — by the behaviour of the people in this story? Perhaps you cannot imagine people in *our* churches acting this way? Well, I can. In fact, something very similar happened in one of our own Reformed churches: I witnessed it. Providentially, I wasn't on the receiving end.

Most of us care a great deal about the lost souls of other countries, and we have very good intentions towards missionaries who return from service overseas. But wanting to do right, and *doing* it, are two different things; and we can stumble in our efforts to

support missionaries simply by not understanding what they're going through.

I've done quite a bit of reading on this subject, and the evidence is overwhelming: missionaries who return to their home country after service overseas have a stressful time. It is *not* the same as returning from a trip, however long. One author describes it as 'reverse culture shock,' and claims that it can be even worse than the emotional and social adjustment that faces missionaries when they first set foot in the country where they go to serve². Another says there are parallels between missionary re-entry and that of a space-shuttle, in the stresses created in the transition from outer space to earth's atmosphere³. Whatever description you use, it's certain that many people have a hard time adjusting to life in their 'home country' after they have served on the mission field. There are many reasons for this; and there are some things that we can do to support those who return, and

help them adjust to life in New Zealand.

Neal Pirolo, in his book *The Re-Entry Team*³, suggests that many re-entry issues can be dealt with by following the principles laid down in Acts 14:26-28, and 15:35. In the following paragraphs I will summarise Pirolo's points, and see how they apply to our own context⁴. But first, let's read what Luke has to say about Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey and their own re-entry...

'...from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples...But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.' (ESV)

They completed their assignment

The first principle we can see in this passage is that Paul and Barnabas completed their assignment: verse 26 states that they had 'fulfilled' the work to which they had been commended. This does not mean everybody they spoke to was saved; it does not mean they stayed until retirement age. It *does* mean that what they were sent out to do, they did.

Getting our work finished on the mission-field can be a difficult task. Short-term teams go overseas with great expectations, only to find the building materials they were promised are nowhere in sight. Some people get to the field after being told 'you're really needed there' — only to find themselves almost surplus to requirements, and not knowing quite how they should fit into the work. Others labour for years and find the task is never finished.

In each case, people back home who 'serve as senders' can help the missionary to complete his assignment. First: help him to prepare properly *before* going overseas, so that he can be fruitful when he gets there. Also: pray regularly. No effective work can be done on the field, without people at home bringing the missionary and his work before the Throne of Grace. Third: keep in touch — whether by email, letter, phone call or even 'care packages'. Fourth: spiritual oversight should not take the form of one phone call a year; *regular* contact is both needed and desired. And finally: personal visits from an elder or church friend are ideal. You wouldn't believe how good it feels for a missionary to be able to share their daily life experiences with somebody from 'home'

— somebody who, finally, *really* knows what life is like here!

These suggestions sound like they're geared towards helping a missionary while he is on the field; and it's true, they are. But how much easier it is to get back into life in New Zealand, if we know we have *completed* what the Lord called us to do, overseas! So this is the first step: do what you can to help the missionary complete his assignment.

They returned to their home church

Pirolo's second point is this: Paul and Barnabas returned to the *same* church that sent them out. In our Reformed churches, this is often pretty straightforward: we don't move around as much as some other groups of New Zealanders, and we normally have quite close ties with our congregations. But sometimes it happens: somebody who wants to do mission work has recently moved from one church to another, or from one town to another. Where are his roots? Which is his 'sending' church? It is not only vital for a missionary to have a home church, but that he absolutely *must* return to that church as his first port of call when he returns to his sending country⁵.

Mission agencies sometimes run re-entry seminars. I know: I've been to one, and it was extremely helpful. It allows a missionary to spend time with others who have returned to New Zealand and face similar stresses as they adjust to a culture they thought they knew...but which has undergone subtle changes in the time they've been away. It reminds us that we are not alone: other people face the same sort of things we're going through. But ultimately our roots are back in our home town, and for both our sake and theirs, we need to spend some of our 'debriefing' time with the people we know. This is the body of Christ, of which we are a part...and it is this body that has a responsibility to share experiences, to laugh and weep together (1 Cor 12:26), and to help missionaries process the experiences of our time on the field.

They received the church's hospitality

Third in Pirolo's list is a point that he takes from Acts 14:28: 'they remained no little time with the disciples' (ESV). Hospitality is both commended and commanded in Scripture, and to my mind, nowhere better is it shown than in the open-hearted generosity of people who take me into their homes as I travel around the country on deputation.

But here, Pirolo is referring to the hospitality of the *home* church; the one that sent Paul and Barnabas out to do their work. The

implication is that the church took the missionaries into their midst, making sure they had their needs met and giving them time to make the transition from field to home.

In our own day, that hospitality may take the form of material assistance: 'home assignment' can be a strain on finances, as missionaries re-provision with clothing and medicines for the next term on the field. It should certainly take the form of friendship and fellowship.

But for those who are returning permanently, the strain is even greater: the need to set up house all at once can be a real problem, even if some personal belongings have been retained and taken out of storage, or shipped from the country of service.

I've known missionaries who have spent years overseas in fruitful and faithful service, and then returned to New Zealand to find themselves excluded from the job market. Doctors, IT people and other professionals may find their industry has passed them by, and their skills are regarded as obsolete — no matter how valuable they were when they worked overseas. Ministers don't generally have quite that problem! But whatever one's area of work, it may be necessary to change to a different type of job on return to New Zealand. And this adds to the stress of re-entry, not only financially, but emotionally as well. Here is where hospitality on the part of the home church is especially appreciated.

They rehearsed all

Pirolo's fourth point is, to me, the most important of the five he takes from this passage in Acts. Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church, they received hospitality, and they reported on what they had done during their missionary journey. But note: they did *not* give a 'condensed summary.' They did *not* have a 5-minute slot during the morning service. No. Scripture tells us that Paul and Barnabas declared *all* that God had done with them.

Why is this so important? Because the missionary needs to recall both the joys and sorrows of his time overseas — particularly if he has, in fact, completed his service and left the mission-field for good. Think of it: he didn't move there to further his career, he moved there to teach people about Jesus. And for that, a personal investment is needed. Most times, a very large one. People he has worked and strived with; people he has poured his heart into... all of them have gone from his life — likely for ever. Pirolo clearly states that 'once a person has

ministered cross-culturally, he will never be the same again⁶.

Because of this, the author's recommendation is that the home church encourage the missionary to 'declare all' that God has done in and through their time overseas, in the form of *multiple* meetings with different groups in the church: different ages of Sunday school classes, career people, ladies' groups, senior citizens' groups.... For each, the missionary will reflect on different aspects of his service. He has to re-think his experiences many times, and that provides an opportunity to process the changes in his life between then and now. Yes, it's stressful — especially if you're not a natural at speaking to groups. But yes, it's also necessary.

Just as important — or more so — is having opportunities for private debriefing. Again, quoting Pirolo: 'A missionary needs to share in the safe environment of a close

friend those deep experiences not easily understood in a public gathering. Name them? Impossible! They will be different with each missionary⁷. The 'safe' friend also needs to be aware that there will be criticism of some people and circumstances the missionary has faced. This is not judgement, as such; it is simply processing the experiences and dealing with the delayed emotional reactions of life in a different culture. I remember the OMF Guest House where I used to stay, sometimes, in the Philippines. They did not encourage Filipino visitors, for the very good reason that expatriate missionaries needed a place where they could go and rest, away from Filipino culture...and *complain* about Filipino culture without local people taking offence. Then, once the 'reaction' was dealt with, the missionaries were happy to return to their much-loved Filipino brothers and sisters, and take up the reins of the work.

And one further point: 'declaring all' that a missionary has done overseas is just as important for the home church as it is for the missionary. Members of the home congregation have called that missionary and

sent him out. They have prayed for him; they have supported him. The work on the field is as much theirs as it is his. They have a right and an obligation — to share in the work by knowing about it. How else can they 'own' the Great Commission, and fulfil their own role in it even though they are not personally in contact with the people 'in all the world' that the Lord would have them reach?

They ministered again

Acts 15:53 records that Paul and Barnabas took up the reins of ministry right there in Antioch, their home church, after they had returned from their missionary journey. This is important, because it helps returning missionaries to adjust to their old/new environment, and to settle into church life again. Remember: while your missionary was away, your life went on, your family changed and grew, and the church also changed. Your missionary will adjust to those changes more rapidly if he is involved with the daily and weekly life of the church. Help him to do

continued page 23

MIF prayer notes

Janice Reid expects a busy time in March, with the tail-end of her visit to family in Hamilton, followed by a radio training course in Singapore, then more teaching in Cambodia at the end of the month (this trip was planned for January but it was re-scheduled at the request of the Cambodian station manager). Pray for energy and wisdom during both travel and training.

Please pray for **Wally & Jeannette Hagoort**, as they leave NZ after a furlough break and settle back into the work in PNG again. Uphold them as they work in the two church plants they are responsible for. Ask the Lord to bless the outreach work and the teaching that is planned for the year.

Fred and Tineke Frericks continue their ministry in Sahiwal, Pakistan in connection with the ARP church of the United States. The vocational school is doing well, although Fred asks special prayer for Christians in the area, that they would not be downhearted, and that they would be able to improve their lives.

Keith and Sisilia van Kessel (Silverstream) were married last month. They spent time over the Christmas period setting up a ministry in Sisilia's homeland of Tonga, with the aim of providing assistance for local and expatriate Tongans. Please pray for wisdom and for God's strength and provision as this ministry ('Word and Deed Mission') is further established. Watch MIF in future months for more information about van Kessels' ministry!

Books in focus

'My Chains Fell Off'

My Chains Fell Off is a newly published book by our very own Dick Nieuwland. Sometimes we make assumptions about our teens: they know the Gospel; they know what God's grace is; they know about sin and repentance, forgiveness and faith. But some do not understand properly. In my catechism classes I have found that many of our teens really don't understand the Gospel. When I ask the question, 'Are you guilty before God?' I have often received the answer, 'Yes, I'm guilty.' And then I ask, 'So how can you go to heaven to live with an absolutely holy God?' And the young person has no answer. *My Chains Fell Off* is a collection of 35 short chapters of 2 ½ or 3 pages each which may help your teen understand the Gospel of salvation by grace. Each chapter looks at life, ourselves, and God's grace, from a different perspective.

Although these chapters were originally given as talks to inmates in prison, the book will be useful for a much wider audience. It is an evangelistic tool to use with folks you think might be interested in learning of God's



grace. In the front there is an outline of the programme used each fortnight in the prison which will give you an idea of what our teams do when they go.

To buy one at the very cheap price of \$5 send your cheque or equivalent to Dick Nieuwland at 80 Longlands Rd West, RD 5, Hastings. You can also contact him on phone/fax (06) 878 4954 or by email on nieuwland@xtra.co.nz

Reviewed by the Rev. Bruce Hoyt

that, by providing opportunities for service.

How long does it take for a returning missionary to work through the re-entry process? It depends on many different factors. How much has the church changed? Is he able to live in the same house as before? What about changes in his work, or professional competencies required by that work? How many changes have there been in technology since he left? (I found self-service petrol stations very scary, the first time I came back: I've heard funny stories about missionaries not knowing how to use EFTPOS and other such things.)

To help missionaries process their re-entry, it's important for members of the home church to be aware of their own feelings. That includes having a biblical attitude towards the people we send out, and also towards missions itself. I've been asked

—by someone in a Reformed church—how many people were saved through my work. How can I answer that? I don't know! The Lord is the One Who saves; I am not called to tally up 'decisions for Christ' or bums on seats in church. I am called to faithfulness, and to serve according to the work that is given me. If people at home ask me to report *according* to that calling, it helps me to process my time on the field rather than to feel there's something I should have done...but didn't.

Pirollo points out that re-entry stress will last much longer, and be much more difficult to overcome, when we deny that it exists⁸. That denial can come from the missionary himself, or from members of the church. But when we acknowledge it, we can seek ways to conquer the inevitable stresses associated with the change of country, work, culture

and relationships that are the lot of any missionary who leaves a field of service and returns to our churches. And as members of the body of Christ, we will be fulfilling our own duty to that body, and to our Head.

Footnotes

- 1 Pirollo, N. The re-entry team: caring for your returning missionaries. San Diego: Emmaus Road International.
- 2 Collins, M.A. (1972). Manual for Missionaries on Furlough. Pasadena: William Carey Library. p.24.
- 3 Jordan, P. (1992). Re-Entry: Making the transition from missions to life at home. Seattle: YWAM Publishing. p.15.
- 4 See Pirollo, N., op cit. p.22-32.
- 5 Pirollo, p.25. Also Donovan, K. (1992) The pastoral care of missionaries; Role of church and mission. The 1992 Leonard Buck Lecture in Missiology; Bible College of Victoria, p.20.
- 6 Pirollo, N. op. cit. p.31.
- 7 Pirollo, N. op.cit. p.29.
- 8 Pirollo, N. op. cit. p.39.

Face to face with C.A.R.E. (India)

As the tourist brochures proclaimed, Welcome to INCREDIBLE India!!

Prominently and confidently displaying my visa, I made a near-midnight entry into India at Chennai (formerly Madras) Airport without incident! Apprehensions were further allayed when, after going through customs, I saw someone holding a sign Rev Dirk van Garderen. Mrs Helina Jebaraj, who runs the C.A.R.E. clinic in Dharmapouri, was at least as anxious to connect with me as I was with her. Welcome indeed to the beginning of a 13-day experience that was to be truly incredible!

My brief was simple. Our denomination's National Diaconate Committee had sent me in order to meet with, experience and evaluate the work and ministry of C.A.R.E. (Centre for AIDS Rehabilitation and Education) which we have been supporting and praying for since 2001. Besides that I was also to visit the Leper Community Housing Project towards which a number of our churches have made contributions. A third project (in connection with the Bucklands Beach congregation) was to visit and evaluate a rural ministry led by a pastor who has connections with our church and was requesting our help.

Orientation

Mr Paulus Samuel and his wife Rosy established C.A.R.E. in Madurai (Tamil Nadu, Southern India) during the 1990s. This couple was already busy for the Lord in estab-

lishing a Christian orphanage for foundling children (Peniel) as well as running a school. They established C.A.R.E after a Hindu doctor, working alongside of Paulus, challenged him, as a Christian, to do something about the ever-growing HIV pandemic in that city. No one else was. In those days there was no help, no support for those afflicted by this condition or their families. Some years later, as this work grew, support was obtained from the T.E.A.R. Fund (Australia), the Christian Reformed Churches in Australia as well our our denomination. Today the C.A.R.E. work is based in four centres – Madurai (base) as well as Dharmapouri to the north, Tutincorin to the east (a coastal city) and Chennai. It was my privilege to visit the clinics C.A.R.E has established in each of these centres, to meet the staff and see this ministry in action.

The harsh reality

My first personal experience of C.A.R.E.'s ministry was to be a home visit in a village just north of Dharmapouri. Stooping to enter through the low doorway of a single roomed, thatched dwelling I was confronted by a woman lying on a wicker bed. She was a 32 year old widow, in the terminal stages of the AIDS virus she had contacted from her husband. Skin over bones, she weighed about 34kgs and was obviously dying.

The only surviving family member was her mother who, on hearing Helina and I were there, stood behind us wringing her hands, begging for help and weeping. Helina spoke soothingly to the woman. She could do little more than hold her hands and remind her of the comfort and hope that Jesus gives in life and in death. I offered to pray.

What more can you do? Well, there was one more thing. The woman asked Helina for some water. Then came the unexpected. In a throaty whisper, she requested that I bless this water before she drank it! Bless water?? Unsure of what was she wanted, I took the cup and prayed asking that it would be received as a sign and seal of Christ's love and life – living water. The woman sipped from the cup gratefully. Little did I know that this would be the very last earthly sustenance that would touch her lips. The next day I was told that she had died at 2.00am. She died in Christ.

The second visit was to visit a little 7-year-old orphaned boy who was staying with his auntie because, as a TB sufferer, he could not be at the orphanage. Auntie was severely crippled and could only move by dragging herself on the dusty dirt by her hands. She supports herself and the boy by peeling and cleaning pods which grow on trees. These pods are used in Indian cuisine. Her earnings? Less than \$(US)1.00 a day,



The C.A.R.E. team at Dharmapouri. Mrs Helina Gebaraj, who established and now heads the ministry there is on the left.

a situation she shares with over 300,000, 000 fellow Indians.¹

What C.A.R.E. does is to give counsel, basic medication (not for HIV – which the government hospitals now provide, but for other conditions such as TB) and food supplements. The impact of being there and showing that someone cares is very real.

In Dharmapouri itself, I was taken to C.A.R.E.'s clinic where I met the staff. Nine women, all dressed in the clinic's uniform – a most stunning purple coloured sari! – were waiting to tell me about their work.

- With one exception, all of them were HIV+ themselves and widows! As counsellors to fellow HIV sufferers they know what happens from first hand experience.
- All of them loved Jesus and testified that he was their only comfort in life and in death. Their commitment was one that was born in the setting of incredible suffering and despair.
- Each of them has been assigned 80 to 120 HIV+ families in the Dharmapouri district. (Families because this condition is almost invariably introduced into the

home by the husband who in turn infects his wife. Children born to infected parents are born HIV+.) These families are visited at least monthly.

- Much work and counselling takes place at 'camps'. These camps are very popular in all kinds of situations in India. Usually organised at a local church or on a Christian School campus, the HIV+ sufferers and their families, meet together for a day (Saturdays as a rule). The C.A.R.E. staff is there to provide counselling, medical checks (usually a local doctor who volunteers his time is also present), a shared meal and the handing out of food supplements. Above all it is a time for sharing and an opportunity to proclaim and explain the gospel to these, mainly Hindu, people.
- Practical help is also provided. The provision of chickens for eggs. Those who receive a chicken are asked to provide 2 eggs at each camp as 'payment' and in order to create means for more. The same is done further up the food chain – providing and rearing goats! (It was my

privilege to give one of these goats (a kid still!) to an ecstatically happy woman. She just couldn't stop smiling and wringing her hands with joy.

The impact? The C.A.R.E. counsellors, filled with the love and compassion of Christ, are making a deep and meaningful impact. Yes, they address the grinding poverty of India's rural poor, the horror of HIV, of widowhood and orphaned children. Yes, they provide practical instruction to enable women to acquire work skills and strategies for dealing with being HIV+. Yes, they are helping provide educational opportunities for the children. But, above all else, they proclaim Christ! This is a true deed and Word ministry.

A few years ago my brother-in-law also visited this work. On comparing notes, he told me this story. Like me, he met with a man who was dying of AIDS. By means of an interpreter he pointed out that he was in fact thankful that he had this horrible condition.

Mystified, my brother-in-law asked, 'Why? How can that be?' The dying man explained that it was because of AIDS that he had met with Helina and the C.A.R.E team in Dharmapouri. They in their turn had been used by the Lord to show him the pearl of great price – the wonder of salvation. Jesus was his Lord! More. He had been used by God to bring his entire family to Christ and the impact had been such that there were now more than 10 other Christians in the village. 'Can you see how God has used what happened to me to be a blessing?' he asked.

That, I believe, is what C.A.R.E. is all about.

Dirk J van Garderen

Footnote

1 This is a conservative figure. However, keep in mind that India's economy is booming as never before. There were many indications of this, especially in the big cities. There is not only incredible poverty but also incredible wealth to be seen everywhere.



One of the counsellors (left) and Helina Gebaraj (right) meeting with a couple. The man was very ill at the time and did his best to pose for this picture.