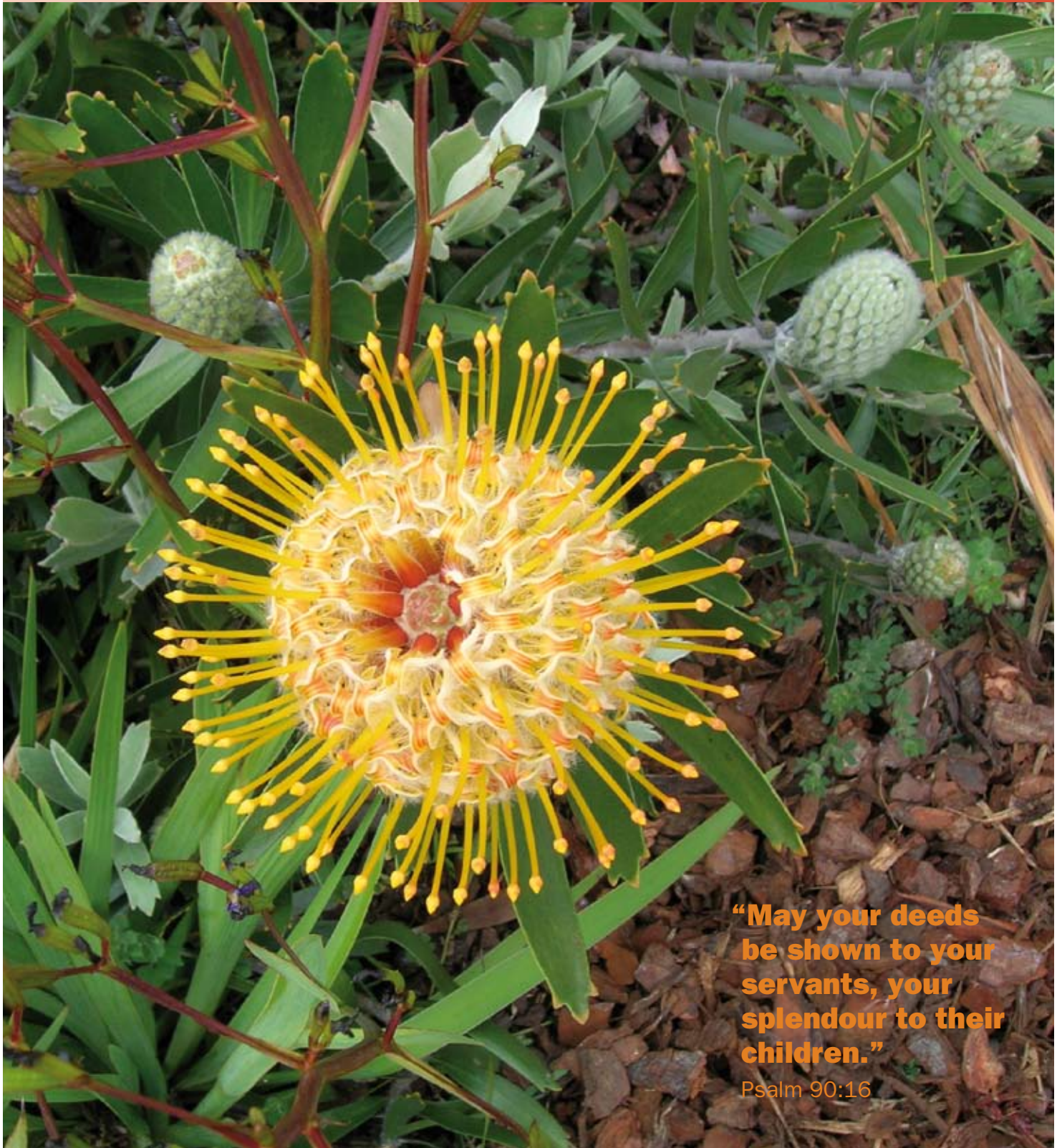


# faith in **focus**

Magazine of the  
Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

VOLUME 35/8 SEPTEMBER 2008



**“May your deeds  
be shown to your  
servants, your  
splendour to their  
children.”**

Psalm 90:16

**CONTENTS**

<b>The ministry of mercy</b> The ordination, mercy and stewardship in the office of Deacon	3
<b>World in focus</b> News from around the world	6
<b>A feminine focus</b> John Calvin's hymn	9
<b>Focus on home</b> Cleanings in focus Christchurch Presbytery short report	12
<b>Missions in focus</b> Andrew Dickson to Uganda	16
<b>Reviews in focus</b> A Breviary of Sin	18
<b>The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands</b> One of our sister churches in the Netherlands	18

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

**The Editor:**

Sjirk Bajema  
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe,  
Manukau 2025.  
Ph/Fax: +64 9 277 9360  
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz  
Reformed Churches Home Page  
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

**Copy Deadline:**

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.  
Church and family notices are free, subject to  
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and  
payment of subscriptions to:

**The Secretary:**

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa  
79 McLeod Street  
Upper Hutt  
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

**Subscription per volume:**

\$40.00 (eleven issues)  
Bulk Rate: \$35.00  
Overseas: \$60.00  
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

**Production Staff:**

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag  
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography  
Printed by: Flying Colours

**Editorial**

Spring has sprung! And it will be with some relief this year after a winter with extremes of severe storms and icy-cold conditions and all sorts of weather in-between! We were very much reminded that creation is groaning, as the apostle writes. Then there were the usual bouts of seasonal illness and the ongoing frailty of the infirm and the elderly. All these are aspects which show our present weakness in a world far from right with her Maker. But let's look all the more to the One who holds all things in His hands.

The seasons of the year remind us of the soon-coming ultimate and definite Climate Change! For then the earth will be renewed following the Lord's return on the clouds of glory. This is the place where there is no more need of the sun or the moon, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21:23).

And with spring we also have Synod too! We pray that all those delegates from our churches may have a blessed meeting in the Lord together. But also we pray for the folk of the Hastings congregation who are going to run be off their feet a little! May their practical preparation help equip us as we deal with the important spiritual matters within our churches. May the light which one day will completely shine up this world also shine there.

While we haven't had any preview of what is happening at this Synod within the pages of 'Faith in Focus' all the congregational bulletins have been well served by John van Dyk's 'Synodical Digest', summing up the various Reports and Overtures. The actual documents themselves are available online at [www.rcnz.org.nz](http://www.rcnz.org.nz).

*The primitive church thought more about  
the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than  
about death or about heaven.*

*The early Christians were looking not for a  
cleft in the ground called a grave, but for a  
cleverage in the sky called Glory.*

*They were watching not for the "undertaker"  
but for the "Uppertaker."*

**Alexander Maclaren**

Photo Credits:

Cover – Betty-Ann Bajema

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

# The ministry of mercy

## *The ordination, mercy, and stewardship in the office of Deacon*

**Leo de Vos**

In his excellent book on the work of deacons, *The Ministry of Mercy*, P.Y. De Jong asks why we need the ministry of mercy today. In an affluent and welfare age, will deacons go extinct like dinosaurs? We might well ask the question — why does the Church need deacons today? If we consider that we live in the modern welfare state when most needs are cared for and no one in our society starves to death why do we need deacons?

The answer is that Christ gave this office to His Church until the end of the world. He will always have people both in and outside the Church who need the loving care, the merciful ministry of the deacons. Just as His heart is tender and filled with mercy to sinners, so His mercy overflows to His poor, often despised people. So that we learn to appreciate the benefits of this office, let us look at what the Bible teaches about this important ministry.

### **I. An ordained ministry**

The actual institution of the office of deacon is first recorded in Acts 6. Notice that this passage informs us that that the work of service to the widows was becoming too great a load for the apostles. Because of this, Greek-speaking church members who thought that their widows were being overlooked complained. This passage informs us that the apostles became overburdened with looking after widows. How could they also attend to the worship of the Church and the ministry of the Word?

'Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that

we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word'. (Acts 6:1-4).

The Church has always recognised the ministry of preaching to be a full-time calling so the preacher doesn't get distracted by too many other things. For this reason, a wise Session will guard against the elders and ministers becoming too involved in administrative duties at the expense of the Word and prayer. Think of the benefit to the Church if elders could study the Word more and spend more time in prayer in Session meetings! The plague in many churches today is that

full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.' (Acts 6:5-6).

The ordination should make it clear to us that this is not only an office of mercy, but also an office invested with Christ's authority. This office does not have lesser authority than the offices of elder or minister, but it is a different office with a different focus. For this reason Reformed churches seriously err when they conclude that, since this office has no authority, women can also be ordained to it. Women have often assisted deacons in the history of the Church, but not as ordained office-

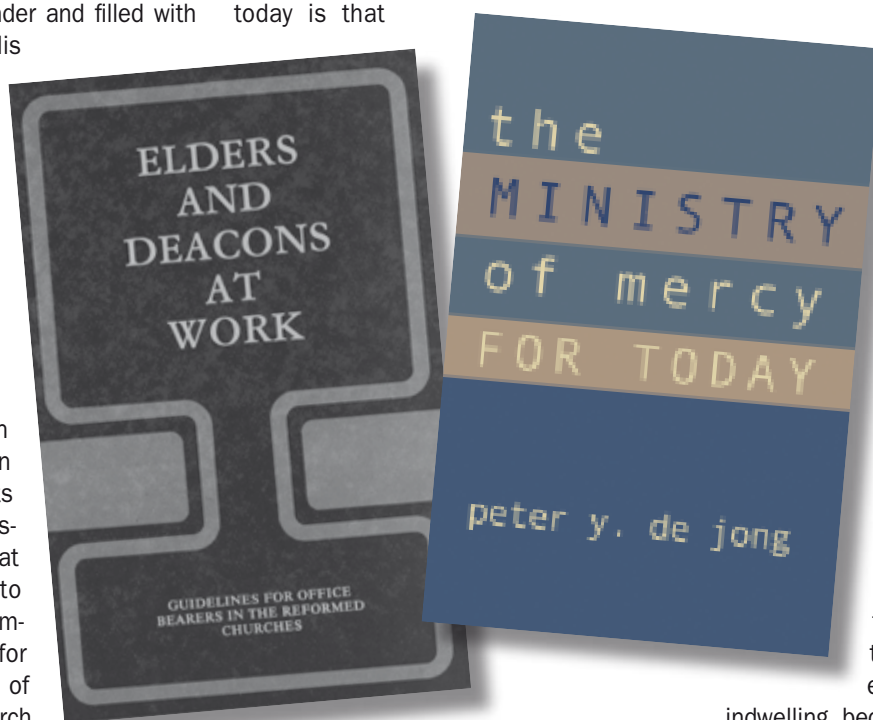
bearers. Perhaps we should also think a bit more about our ordination practise. If elders in our churches lay hands on deacons during ordination, should not deacons also participate in laying hands on elders? For they also have an authoritative office under Christ.

We should look at the qualifications of these men if we are to understand their beautiful work and calling. The men chosen as deacons were *filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom*. This means they had both the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit. These men gave evidence of the Holy Spirit's

indwelling because they lived a holy life — their temperaments, their family life, their entire lives were Spirit-controlled. They had special gifts and fruit from the Holy Spirit for this office. (These gifts are listed in 1 Timothy 3). Are the young men in our churches striving to prepare themselves for this office or for the office of elder or minister?

### **II. A mercy ministry**

'So what is the deacon called to do? We have seen from Acts 6 that this is an office of administration, especially of mercy. It is helpful to compare the New Testament of-



the minister is busy doing everything except praying and preaching.

Because of the distraction to the ministry of the Word the Church nominated *seven men, of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*, to look after the business of *servicing* the widows' tables. The NT word for *deacon* comes from the noun *diakonia* meaning a service of love and the noun *diakonos* which means *a servant*. Notice that the congregation chose these men and the apostles ordained them.

'And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man

fices to those in the Old Testament: a) the minister has a prophetic office based on the OT prophet (here in Acts 6, the ministry of the Word and prayer. b) The elder has a ruling office based upon the OT king. c) The deacon has an office of mercy based upon the OT priest. The priest had many official functions in regulating worship, but his ministry was also a ministry of mercy. In Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan, the priest in walking past the man in the ditch was neglecting his office of mercifully assisting the sick and needy.' (Luke 10:25-37).

The very foundation of Israel's life and religion was God's pity for His poor and distressed people with whom He had sworn an everlasting covenant (The Ministry of Mercy, P.Y. De Jong, p. 31). So this office is already deeply rooted in the OT. Texts such as these from Deuteronomy and Leviticus demonstrate God's care for his poor people:

'If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).

'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God.' (Leviticus 19:9-10).

So the poor in the covenant were to be taken care of. In fact, the Old Testament principle was that the unfortunate and disadvantaged should never be deprived of covenant joy. It is most important to realise that in the Old Testament God is deeply concerned about the social, the

emotional, the psychological, the spiritual and financial needs of His people. For widows need help, refugees need shelter, the distressed need comfort.

Has this changed in the New Testament? In the New Testament our Lord demonstrates the greatest love and care towards the needy. The Form for the Ordination of Deacons quotes Matthew 25:40 directly: the needy are appointed by the Lord to represent Himself in our expression of sympathy and benevolent service on earth. The Lord does not change concerning His care for His hurting, disadvantaged people; rather, they picture Him. Christ's words that showing sympathy to His suffering people is showing sympathy to Him is nicely illustrated by this incident in the life



of the missionary to Africa, Robert Moffat. Moffat had arrived to visit a great chief Moselekatshe, 'an absolute despot ruling over a tribe of fierce warriors' in whose 'savage breast there were chords that could be touched by tact and kindness'.

During one of their interviews the monarch, laying his hand upon Moffat's shoulder said, 'My heart is all white as milk; I am still wondering at the love of a stranger who never saw me. You have fed me, you have carried me in your arms. I live today by you, a stranger.'

Upon Moffat replying that he was unaware of having rendered any such service, he said pointing to his two ambassadors: 'These are great men; Umbate is my right hand. When I sent them from my presence to see the land of the white men, I sent

my ears, my eyes, my mouth; what they heard I heard, what they saw, and what they said, it was Moselekatshe who said it. You fed them and clothed them, and when they were to be slain, you were their shield. You did it unto me. You did it unto Moselekatshe, the son of Machobane.' (Robert Moffat of Kuruman, by David, J. Deane, p. 109).

So we should understand that the deacon's task is spiritual and that he is not less than a minister of Jesus Christ to the Lord's hurting ones. But we must be careful not to exclude every believer from participating in this crucial work. Indeed, the deacons must be examples and encourage all of God's people in such acts of love and mercy. Notice how crucial the ministry of mercy is for the entire congregation. Matthew 25:34-40 warns each member that it is not the big things we do which really count, but the little things. The meals you make when a mother is sick, the clothing you bring when a refugee family has none, the visit of encouragement brought when someone is down in the dumps, the card sent, the phone call made, the invitation to a pleasant meal extended — all these acts are noticed by our Lord. In fact, ministering to the least of Christ's brethren is the same as loving and serving Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40)! The deacons above all have an essential task to cultivate this love, mercy, and care among God's people.

So what about welfare and the benefits of the State? Remember that the government does not give anything with the love of Christ. The government does not give a red cent which it has not taxed from someone else! Our social system in NZ reminds us of how the government of Rome kept buying votes by pouring ship-loads of free grain into the city of Rome. A system which encourages people not to work or not to work harder and rewards people who refuse to work will, like Rome, eventually self-destruct. Now of course Christians pay taxes and are part of the social system; one cannot opt out and it is only wise to take what is given for family living and schooling. But Christ's love and mercy brought by the deacons is far better than any government program! There are many households in New Zealand towns and cities where a visit could bring Christ's mercy to someone dying of cancer, and Christ's encouragement to a single parent, or a person with no work.

### III. A stewardship ministry

Being filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom

means the deacons are to be wise in understanding how God's word applies to daily life. This means that the deacon will be able to listen patiently and then provide Biblical solutions for practical Christian living. We live in a secular, materialistic society where people live for the here and now. Secularism and materialism are the two big words describing what people are really living for. The deacons must be aware of just how tightly these tentacles can grab the hearts and minds of Christian people too. Many buy appliances and furniture they cannot afford, take holidays they struggle to pay for and desire instant gratification. Unwise spending and planning causes some Christians to sink deeper into debt. Ignore the warning of Proverbs and one soon becomes a slave: The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7). And they fail to live in the trust in which our Lord encourages us to live: 'Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?' (Matthew 6:25).

The work of deacons is just as important today as ever before. Deacons are not just people who collect and count money; they are called to teach Biblical stewardship in the church.

This is why the deacons should be encouraged to teach a session on budgeting in the pre-marriage counselling class. They could also be called to teach a session of the Confession of Faith class about the financial obligations which come with Church membership.

When we read or hear the job description in the Form for the Ordination of Deacons, we probably do not reflect on the implications of this form for the work of deacons. Notice that they are to be *faithful and diligent in the ingathering of the offerings which God's people make in gratitude to the Lord*. Why does the form say *faithful and diligent*? Is not collecting money a rather straight-forward job? A very important principle of Scripture is at stake here. Notice that God's people give of these offerings *in gratitude* to the Lord. But some of God's people can become sluggish and delinquent in their giving. So the deacon acts faithfully and diligently when he ensures that the principle of 2 Corinthians 9:7 is being exercised in the church: *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*.

The Form also says that the deacons' work consists in *the prevention of poverty*. Have you noticed that this article is wisely placed before the statement which says that the deacon must also serve *in the humble and cheerful distribution of gifts according to the need*? Obviously the prevention of poverty is preferred to having to look for a cure! So the deacons might have to counsel a family in godly stewardship and wise budgeting so that they do not become impoverished and bankrupt. Because of the increase of materialism today, there is an increasing need for this stewardship ministry today.

The Form also now states that the deacon must work *in the humble and cheerful distribution of gifts according to the need*. When a medical emergency arises, the deacons do not wait for a phone call, but visit as soon as possible to offer assistance in the name of Christ. When a father suddenly becomes unemployed, the deacons make inquiry about the family's financial state and offer help. When a family has a funeral the deacons visit and offer comfort as well as assistance to the grieving.

The Form also says that the work of the deacons consists *in the relief of the distressed by kindly deeds*. Think of how the deacons could arrange for young men in the church to mow a widow's lawn. Recent studies from Otago University have proven that the mortality rate of elderly people more than doubles in New Zealand winters because of the many poorly-insulated and unheated homes. Deacons must help here by making sure the elderly have warm, efficiently-heated homes. How about a working-bee to re-insulate the homes of the elderly?

Deacons are to visit *with words of consolation and cheer from the Scriptures*. This means that the deacons usually read God's Word and pray when they visit. Here we again see that the office of the deacon includes the authoritative ministry of the Scriptures in the homes of the congregation.

Perhaps one of the problems the deacons face is that people often let pride stand in the way of seeking help. If someone is not managing things financially, they might need counsel. And why not ask for help before the problem is out of control?

The book of Acts closes this section (chapter 6) by showing how the church was richly blessed by the addition of deacons. The Word was preached powerfully and

the church grew. Even Jewish priests were convicted and converted to the Christian faith. Let us pray that the Lord will bless the ministry of the deacons among us so that His Word can go forward unhindered.

*This article is a combination of my thoughts from a speech given at the Deacons' Conference held in Wainuiomata 2007, and from a sermon preached at the ordination of a deacon also in 2007. The National Diaconate requested that these thoughts be considered for Faith in Focus.*

*The Rev Leo de Vos is the minister of the Word and the sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata.*

## WELLINGTON PRESBYTERY VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT

**Saturday 27th September  
Wainuiomata**

**IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY  
ENROLLED YOUR TEAM IT'S  
TIME TO DO IT NOW!**

**(8 players per team,  
including 2 reserves and at  
last one female player)**

**No limit to the number of  
teams per church**

**A fundraiser for Hutt Valley  
Christian School**

**This is a great day packed  
full of competition with  
lots of fellowship thrown in  
between games**

**Spectators and enthusiastic  
supporters welcome**

**Let's see if someone  
can take the cup off  
Silverstream Black –  
keep practising Palmerston!**

**Please direct any questions  
to Frances Leibbrandt  
(04)564 3532,  
027 412 7676**



## World in focus

### Scot attacks PCA

The outgoing Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Very Rev Sheilagh Kesting (the first woman to hold the office), has criticized the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. In her retiring Moderator's report to the Scottish Assembly, she said: 'The Presbyterian Church of Australia had just taken a decision in its assembly to discontinue the ordination of women to the eldership (*sic*) – a similar decision having been taken in

relation to ministry a few years ago.

'One of the saddest moments in my year was when I asked why the church had taken this decision. Was it a growing theological conservatism? 'No,' I was told, 'It is worse than that. It is about purifying the church.' As a woman whose call to ministry has been confirmed by the church that has since called me to be its Moderator, I found that very hard to bear and my heart went out to the women in the Presbyterian Church, ordinary, everyday

women who are the backbone of any congregation, and who in their conversations with me were so clearly hurt by the decision of their assembly. And it goes out too to those men whom I met who also struggle with this decision.'

+ *Australian Presbyterian*, July 2008

### Little refuge from intensive persecution in Eritrea

Eritrea, one of the world's worst abusers of religious liberty, has been listed by the US Commission of International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) since 2004 – and the situation is worsening. Some 2000 mostly Protestant Christians are imprisoned for their faith in appalling conditions, and the regime of dictator-president Isaias Afwerki has taken control of the influential Eritrean Orthodox Church. The regime's gross human rights violations have created a refugee crisis in the region. But in June, Egypt forcibly returned some 1000 refugees to Eritrea. Libya too is said to be about to mass-deport Eritrean refugees. A number of refugees returned to Eritrea have reportedly been incarcerated, tortured or shot dead. Please pray for the Church in Eritrea, for Eritrean refugees, and for freedom for Eritrea.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 485 | Wed 02 Jul 2008

### GAFCON Calls Anglicans to Reformation

On 22 June, the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) opened in Jerusalem where more than 1000 conservative Anglican leaders held a week-long meeting to examine the future of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Nigerian Archbishop and conservative Anglican leader Peter Akinola expressed concern for the future unity of the Communion by saying, 'Those who failed to admit that by the unilateral actions they took in defiance of the Communion have literally torn the very fabric of our common life at its deepest level since 2003, are grumbling that we are here to break the Communion.'

A statement issued at the conclusion of the GAFCON meeting included an announcement of plans for a group of 300 conservative Anglican leaders to oversee the continuing GAFCON movement, their

*"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2)*

## Hastings Christian School (secondary teachers wanted)

Hastings Christian School has recently been granted permission by the Minister of Education to extend its teaching programme through to Year 13. We give thanks to God for His provision in this regard, as it ushers in an exciting new phase in the development of Christian schooling in Hawke's Bay.

Currently the school is Year 1–10, so over the next few years we have the challenge of putting into place a senior secondary school curriculum. The school has just opened a new block of classrooms designed specifically for the secondary area. We are therefore beginning the process of looking for qualified and competent Christian teachers who are committed to upholding and maintaining the confessional statements that define the special character of our school. Interested teachers must be willing to take up the challenge of implementing a senior curriculum in their respective subject area(s). Subjects that we are looking at in particular are: Science (Chemistry, Physics, Biology), Art, Graphics, Economics, Accounting, Physical Education and Languages.

If you are a teacher who is qualified in one or more of these subject areas and you would like to know more about the Hastings Christian School, then we would love to hear from you.

Gerald Feyter  
Deputy Principal

School: 06 878 6696  
Home: 06 870 6697

efforts to defend the Gospel from liberal and revisionist theologies, and to continue to offer pastoral oversight to conservative parishes stranded within liberal member churches of the Anglican Communion.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams criticized the GAFCON meeting, describing their proposals as creating more problems than they solve and urging Anglicans to work for changes within existing Anglican organizational structures.

Canadian Archbishop Fred Hiltz repudiated the GAFCON statement that Anglican churches in the USA and Canada [by their recent actions] have been proclaiming a false gospel.

+ *Christianity Today International*, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188, 630-260-6200, Fax: 630.260.0114, [mwhite@christianitytoday.com](mailto:mwhite@christianitytoday.com)

+ *Episcopal Church Center* 815 Second Avenue New York, New York 10017, 800-334-7626, [cdawkins@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:cdawkins@episcopalchurch.org)

+ *Ecumenical News International*, Post Office Box 2100, CH - 1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland, 41-22-791-6111, Fax: 41-22-788-7244, [eni@eni.ch](mailto:eni@eni.ch)

### **Assyrian Christians targeted by Islamists**

Assyrian Christians in northern Iraq are being persecuted by Islamists who wage a campaign of violence including murder of clergy and laity, abduction and rape of young Assyrian women, theft and property confiscation, and bombings of churches and businesses. The Assyrian International News Agency characterizes the plight of Assyrian Christians as 'a minority [caught] between genocide, fear and terrorism'.

A letter was recently sent to churches in Mosul from an Islamic group calling itself 'The Battalion of Just Punishment, Jihad Base in Mesopotamia' calling Assyrian Christians 'the dhimmi people' [derogatory Islamic term for Christians and Jews] and warning them to not establish a recently proposed police force to protect them from the violence being done to them by Islamists.

+ *Assyrian International News Agency*

### **Westminster Professor suspended from teaching**

Westminster Theological Seminary Professor of Old Testament Peter Enns was in March suspended from teaching by the institution's board of trustees and will face a four-day hearing scheduled in August to determine whether or not the tenured faculty member will be dismissed from the seminary.

Enn's book Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old

Testament precipitated the suspension due to its contentions about supposed contradictions and inconsistencies in Scripture, inferences that parts of the Bible are taken from literature from Israel's neighboring lands, and allegations that New Testament authors take certain Old Testament passages out of context when they are attribute them to prophesy of the coming of Jesus Christ.

Westminster frames the issue as being whether or not Enns violated the oath he took when he joined the faculty which pledges that faculty will not inculcate, teach or insinuate anything contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which proclaims the infallible truth and entire perfection of Holy Scripture whose sole author is God.

Further to this news item, we subsequently received the following: Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) professor Peter Enns and WTS issued a joint statement 23 July announcing the end of his time with the seminary, eliminating the need for a dismissal hearing scheduled for 25 August. Enns was suspended because of theological issues in his book, "Inspiration and Incarnation," and whether it fell within the bounds of the Westminster Confession of Faith. All WTS faculty must affirm that confession. According to the statement, Enns and the WTS administration both agreed to his leaving.

+ *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, 400 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19130, 215-854-4500

+ *Westminster Theological Seminary*, Post Office Box 27009, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118, 800-373-0119, Fax: 215-887-5404

### **Hindu confidence grows in India**

When the Hindu nationalist BJP ruled India from February 1998 to May 2004, persecution of Christians was systematic and severe.

Whilst the BJP was humiliated by their 2004 election loss, they eventually emerged in 2006 with a vengeance and a strategy to regain power. Their focus is to convert India's animist tribal masses to Hinduism and so convert them politically to vote BJP. To motivate the tribals to convert, the Hindu nationalists tell them that India's security is under threat from foreign forces and that Christians are agents of the CIA out to subvert and divide India.

India's only hope (so they say) is to have the tribals join the Hindu 'mainstream' and fight. Hindu nationalists have been advancing this strategy unchallenged for over two years now.

Persecution has escalated and the BJP's confidence is growing. Please pray for India.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 486 | Wed 09 Jul 2008

### **McDonald's says opposition to homosexuality is hate**

When the American Family Association (AFA) wrote to McDonald's in opposition to its obtaining membership in and a seat on the Board of Directors of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC) for a \$20,000 contribution, their spokesman Bill Whitman responded by saying that those who oppose homosexuality are motivated by hate.

AFA Chairman Don Wildmon dismissed that characterization by emphasizing that the focus is upon McDonald's choosing 'not to remain neutral but to give the full weight of their corporation to promoting the homosexual agenda, including homosexual marriage'.

+ *Christian News Wire*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington, DC 20006, 202-546-0054, [newsdesk@christiannewswire.com](mailto:newsdesk@christiannewswire.com)

+ *American Family Association*, Post Office Drawer 2440, Tupelo, Mississippi 38803, 662-844-5036

+ *McDonald's Corporation*, 2111 McDonald's Drive, Oak Brook, Illinois 60523, 800-244-6227

### **Bible publishers sued for sexual sin references**

Bradley LaShawn Fowler, a Michigan homosexual, is suing Zondervan Publishing Company for \$60 million and Thomas Nelson Publishing for \$10 million for scriptural passages in the Bibles that they publish that identify homosexual behavior as sin.

U.S. District Judge Julian Abele Cook Jr., who will hear Fowler's case against Thomas Nelson, says the court 'has some very genuine concerns about the nature and efficacy of [Fowler's] claims'.

+ *Newsmax*, Post Office Box 20989, West Palm Beach, Florida 33416, 561-686-1165, Fax: 561-686-3350

+ *Zondervan Publishing*, 5300 Patterson Avenue Southeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

+ *Thomas Nelson Publisher*, Post Office Box 141000, Nashville, Tennessee 37214, 800-251-4000

### **Christians in Yemen arrested**

Since October 2007 Islamic sources have been claiming large numbers of Muslims are converting to Christianity in Yemen. The World Muslim League has urged the Yemeni government to curb conversions and al-Qaeda deputy Ayman Al-Zawahiri has called for a 'media jihad' in Yemen against missionaries and apostasy (leaving Islam).

In mid-June 2008 Yemeni authorities arrested what they described as a 'missionary cell' of seven people, charging them with promoting Christianity and distributing the Bible. One member, Hadni Dohni, is also charged with converting to Christianity. The believers are presently being 'investigated'. Religious liberty monitors believe these Christians are at grave risk of beatings, torture and murder.

Please pray for these believers and that their arrests will not be in vain but will arouse interest in the gospel. Pray for the Church in Yemen.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 487 | Wed 16 Jul 2008

### Reformed Family Worship Book

Ginny Youmans of [ReformingMinds](#) has written the [Reformed Family Worship Book](#) that includes introductory material about Reformed theology, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Catechism for Young Children, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism with school year catechism study schedules, and Robert Murray M'Cheyne's Calendar for Daily Bible Reading. It is available for \$19.95 plus shipping from the web site.

+ [ReformingMinds](#)

### Focus on the Family elected to National Radio Hall of Fame

The *Focus on the Family* radio program has been elected to the National Radio Hall of Fame, joining such historic programs as *Your Hit Parade*, *The Shadow*, *Little Orphan Annie* and Orson Welles' famous *Mercury Theater*.

Dr James Dobson's broadcast was nominated in the 'national active' category, alongside Bob Costas, Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Howard Stern. To qualify, a broadcaster must have contributed to the radio industry on a national level for at least 10 years.

For the first time, voting was open to the public. The formal induction ceremony takes place in Chicago in November.

+ *Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, Colorado* 80995, 800-232-6459

### Professor fired for answering student's question about genetics and homosexuality

On 21 June 2007 in a human heredity course at San Jose City College, Adjunct Professor June Sheldon answered a student's question about how heredity affects homosexual behavior by citing the class textbook and a well-known German scientist who had found a relationship between

maternal stress and homosexual behavior. Additionally, she mentioned that in a later chapter of the text the students would learn that homosexual behavior may be influenced by both genes and the environment.

Following a student complaint, Sheldon was investigated, then recommended for removal from the adjunct seniority rehire preference list and terminated by the board of trustees on 13 February 2008.

Represented by the Alliance Defense Fund, Sheldon has filed a lawsuit against the school for violating her 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights under the US Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1871, and are seeking that the defendants be held accountable for their actions, that Sheldon be restored to her position, and that she be compensated for violations of her constitutional rights.

The San Jose City College attorney characterizes the charges as '...factually and legally incorrect in every respect.'

+ *LifeSiteNews.com, Incorporated, Post Office Box 25382, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15220, 866-787-9947, lsn@lifesitenews.com*

+ *Alliance Defense Fund, 15100 North 90th Street, Scottsdale, Arizona 85260, 800-835-5233, Fax: 480-444-0025*

### Uzbekistani Christian faces 15-year sentence

Uzbekistani Protestant Christian Aimurat Khayburahmanov is facing a 15-year prison term after being arrested for teaching religion without official approval and for establishing or participating in a 'religious extremist' organization. The extremism charge was based on Khayburahmanov gathering people in his home and reading Christian literature prohibited by the local Religious Affairs Committee.

Khayburahmanov has repeatedly been beaten by his captors in an attempt to force him to implicate other Christians, and is kept in an isolation cell.

Authorities in the Karakalpakstan Region of Uzbekistan consider as criminal behavior all non-state-controlled Muslim and non-Russian Orthodox religious activity.

+ *Crosswalk.com, Salem Communications, 4880 Santa Rosa Road, Camerillo, California, 805-987-0400*

+ *Russian Orthodox Church, 75 East 93rd Street, New York, New York 10128, 212-534-1601, englishinfo@russianorthodoxchurch.ws*

### Terror in Southern Philippines on Basilan Island

Christians on Basilan Island – which is in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, Southern Philippines – are being terrorised by Islamic militants, and police are reluctant

to intervene. Islamic 'holy warriors' issued an ultimatum on Friday 18 July that all Christians on Basilan must either convert to Islam, submit to Islamic subjugation and pay jizya (tribute / protection money), or face violence. It gives the Christians 15 days before terror is unleashed. Early Sunday morning 20 July, Islamic militants ambushed a passenger jeepney and kidnapped the five Christians (including two children) but left the Muslims. Please pray for the Church in Muslim Southern Philippines, especially for security for the Christians of Basilan.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 488 | Wed 23 Jul 2008

### Washington State Bishop at Lambeth Conference calls African Leaders Demonic

At the once-a-decade Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, England, Anglican leaders in Africa who criticize liberal Episcopal leaders in the USA for ordaining homosexual priests and blessing same sex unions were characterized as 'demonic' by The Right Rev John Chane, the Bishop of Washington (DC).

+ *VirtueOnline, 1236 Waterford Road, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380*

### Pakistan court grants custody of girls to kidnappers

The Muslim captors of two Christian Pakistani girls ages 10 and 13 kidnapped from their parents in June were awarded their custody during a court decision 12 July in a Muzaffargarh District and Sessions court hearing.

The girls, accompanied by 16 Muslim men, were given five minutes to testify where they claimed to have converted to Islam. The older girl claimed that she was 17 and that she had married a Muslim man.

The parents, who have appealed the court decision, were not allowed to speak with their daughters nor allowed to present birth certificates and school records proving the girls' true ages.

The father expressed fear that the kidnappers run a prostitution ring and have been sexually abusing the girls. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reports that kidnapping and sexual abuse of children is a serious problem, and a spokesman said that religious minorities are an easy target because of their poverty and the religious bias against them.

Christians comprise only 2 percent of Pakistan's 168 million citizens.

+ *Compass Direct News Service, Post Office Box 27250, Santa Ana, California 92799, 949-862-0304, Fax: 949-752-6536, info@compassdirect.org*



## Feminine focus

# Hymns and their context: Calvin

**Sally Davey**

We are all aware of the importance of the Reformation. It was a great turning point in the history of the church when biblical truth was rediscovered. What the Apostles and the early church fathers had taught was lost for centuries, as error and superstition reigned in the medieval Roman Catholic church. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and the other reformers in the sixteenth century rediscovered it and restored it to the Church. We tend (and quite rightly) to think of the Reformation in terms of its teaching: it was a recovery of truth, a movement of ideas.

There is a lot to be said for this view. The Reformers were intellectual giants in their day. They had been university-trained. They were compelling teachers who had studied both the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. Some, like Luther, were university professors. They earned their international reputations in important public debates and through their scholarly writings as they defended the truth. They had much correspondence with other scholars, and were looked to by kings and councils for advice.

### The Reformers as men of faith

But there is more – much more – to the Reformation than ideas *per se*. The Reformers were men of faith. They loved the Lord Jesus Christ. Having come to know him through scrupulous study of the Scriptures in their original languages, and often in deep anguish of soul, they knew that it was only the death of the Saviour that rescued them from their sin. Their teaching was no intellectual sport – it was a matter of life and death for the Church of God. If the gospel, as found in the Scriptures, was to remain distorted by Rome so that the ordinary Christian could not understand it, then the way of salvation would be lost to him in this life and for eternity. True teaching is life for the Church. The return to the Scriptures was a recovery of all that lies at

the heart of the Christian life: the burden of sin removed, the help of the Spirit in daily living, a life of joy and peace; and hope for eternity. The Reformers were men of deep piety. They loved the Word of God, they fed on it, they prayed, they enjoyed the fellowship and encouragement of like-minded believers. And they were tested. All of them faced danger at different times in their lives. They stood trial, they fled for their lives. Some daily expected the kinds of sufferings inflicted by Rome on earlier contenders for truth. Some – Cranmer and Latimer among them – did in fact die terrible deaths. These men counted the personal cost of trusting Christ – and were prepared to pay it.



*A much younger Calvin*

### The centrality of God's Word

The Reformation was a return to the important truths of the Bible, and these central gospel truths pointed to the need for far-reaching reforms in the practice of the Christian church. We are familiar with some of these, such as the ending of the selling of indulgences peddled as guaranteeing a soul's immediate entrance into heaven. But did you know that one of the Reformers' major concerns was worship practice in the sixteenth century church? It might surprise you to know that ours is not the first age in church history to experience intense – and heated – debate over what we should do in worship. And even over what we should sing in worship. In fact, there were what we might even call 'worship wars' over the subjects of the

words sung, musical accompaniment, and musical style.

Because the Reformation was a period of such faithful study of God's Word, it was also a time of considerable depth in Christian experience. It could, I believe, be considered a time of Christian revival. Such times are very conducive to the writing of good songs for worship. Many of the great hymns of the faith have come from such periods. They flourished and multiplied in the soil of truth, and have gone on to teach that truth to the many generations of those who have sung them since. The hymns and metrical psalms of the Reformation were written by those whose hearts were alight with God's truth.

### Singing with understanding

The other important thing to grasp is that Reformation songs were written to meet a particular need in the church. This was for ordinary Christians to be able to sing with understanding. What was the problem with singing in the medieval worship service, and what kind of singing did the Reformers advocate in its place? Worship in the Middle Ages had become an elaborate spectacle of priests and choirs, superstition and ritual, only dimly understood by the vast majority of worshippers. Roman Catholic congregations had been reduced to mere spectators of the Latin Mass. Only the educated priesthood, having been taught the language and knowing the complicated music, could take it in. Most of the people simply came to be fed the bread of the mass, which they had been taught actually became the body of Christ through a miraculous transformation on the pronouncement of the priest. The Reformers wanted to change all this: they wanted the people to understand what they saw, what they heard, and what they prayed and sang. And they wanted error to be replaced by truth in all the elements of worship, including the words sung by the congregation.

### Reformers differ here

The different Reformers had slightly different solutions to the problem. Luther's aim was to remove anything directly contrary to the Scriptures from worship; and he focused particularly on the falsehood expressed in the mass. Luther was happy to retain much from the past, so long as it was not inconsistent with Scripture. In Germany the

churches continued to chant the psalms, and they also sang the wonderful hymns that flourished in the German Reformation. The big thing was that all the singing was in German. Luther was a very good musician in addition to being a theologian and pastor, and he wrote many hymns. Some were based on psalms, some on other parts of Scripture. In all of them he aimed to teach the people as they sang – and in fact, he valued music as second only to the preaching of the Word.

Other Reformers held a more stringent view of what should be sung in worship; and they emphasised the Psalms because they were the inspired Word. In order to make the Psalms easy for the common people to sing, in their own language, a whole new trend developed. It was John Calvin who championed this new trend, the metrical psalm. As you are probably aware, metrical versions of the psalms are paraphrases of the biblical texts in verse form, with regular poetic meter and rhyming lines. It is most likely Old Testament congregations had chanted the psalms in some form or other; and it seems that the early church continued this way of singing

them. By the late Middle Ages, though, musical arrangements had become too intricate for congregations to sing easily. But Calvin was so committed to having the congregation sing with ease, and above all in their own language, that he seized upon metrical psalms with gusto. So where did the idea come from?

### Calvin's development

It was Clement Marot, a French court poet, who first produced metrical versions of the Psalms, beginning in 1533 with Psalm 6. They became very popular at court – courtiers sang them for pleasure, and the heir to the throne was delighted with them. People would adopt their own individual psalm as a personal signature tune. (Thus, their origin was secular.) When Calvin came across them during his time at Strasbourg (1538-41) he introduced them into the worship of the church there, and published 12 of them in his Psalter of 1539. By the time he died in 1554 Marot had written 50 metrical paraphrases. Calvin was keen to see the whole Psalter paraphrased in this way, and urged Theodore Beza to complete the task. In 1562 the

entire 150-psalm Psalter (later known as the 'Geneva Psalter') was published. This became hugely influential throughout the reformed churches in continental Europe (France, Holland, etc) and provided a model for subsequent metrical psalters written in England and Scotland. Metrical psalmody became the order of the day for all these churches for more than 150 years. Calvin himself was a competent poet (although he modestly denied the value of his efforts). He attempted a number of metrical versions of the Psalms, though none were included in the Genevan Psalter.

From what we have covered so far, it will be clear that John Calvin was, in addition to being one of the great reformed leaders of the sixteenth century, a scholar, a literary man, and a pastor who wanted his people to be able to sing the songs of the Bible with understanding. As we have seen, he was particularly keen for them to sing the Psalms, and seized upon the metrical paraphrase form as meeting the requirements for singing with understanding. Some of these metrical psalms were fine compositions, and still remain in our hymn books and psalters, 450 years later. Think of the 'Old Hundredth' ('All people that on earth do dwell'), Louis Bourgeois's version of Psalm 100.

*I greet Thee, who my sure Redeemer art,  
My only Trust and Saviour of my heart,  
Who pain didst undergo for my poor sake;  
I pray Thee from our hearts all cares to take.*

*Thou art the King of mercy and of grace,  
Reigning omnipotent in every place:  
So come, O King, and our whole being sway,  
Shine on us with the light of Thy pure day.*

*Thou art the Life by which alone we live,  
And all our substance and our strength receive;  
Comfort us by Thy faith and by Thy power,  
Nor daunt our hearts when comes the trying hour.*

*Thou hast the true and perfect gentleness,  
No harshness hast Thou and no bitterness;  
Make us to taste the sweet grace found in Thee  
And ever stay in Thy sweet unity.*

*Our hope is in no other save in Thee,  
Our faith is built upon Thy promise free;  
Come, give us peace, make us so strong and sure,  
That we may conquerors be and ills endure.*

### Looking at hymns

But let us now turn our attention to hymns, keeping in mind, nonetheless, that psalms are a vital part of the context from which Reformation-period hymns came. One of the loveliest hymns of the Reformation period, 'I greet Thee, Who my sure Redeemer art', has been attributed to Calvin. He is thought to have written it while he was in Strasbourg in the late 1530s. Calvin is so well-known as a promoter of psalm-singing that it might surprise you to know he wrote a hymn. However, it is worth remembering that in Genevan worship the churches sang songs other than psalms, such as the canticles<sup>1</sup> of the New Testament. In order to understand the context of this hymn and the mind of its writer, let us turn back to Calvin and the experiences that shaped his life.

Calvin was born and spent his early years in Noyon, in France, where his father was a well-off ecclesiastical lawyer on the staff of the Notre Dame cathedral there. He was a bright boy of exceptional promise, and looked set for a distinguished academic or legal career. Given his father's work he was very familiar with all the workings of the Roman Catholic church – you could

say he was brought up right in the thick of church life. He studied at the universities of Paris, Orleans and Bourges; and it appears that it was while he was in Bourges that he was introduced to the ideas of Martin Luther through a relative. Unlike Luther, he did not experience a prolonged period of spiritual struggle, and seems to have come to faith in Christ quickly. Once converted (probably in the early 1530s) he joined the efforts of those who sought to reform the church in France.

When in the autumn of 1533 his friend, Nicholas Cop, delivered an address at the University of Paris considered by the authorities to be heretical, Calvin was implicated and found himself on the run for over a year. He moved around France and in January 1534 arrived in Basel, where various reformers were in residence. From there he returned briefly to France to help settle his late parents' affairs, then left with his brother and half-sister, knowing full well he could not stay. Planning to head for Strasbourg, another gathering-place for reformed refugees, he was diverted to Geneva due to bad weather. There he encountered the famous reformer of the church in Geneva, Guillaume Farel who, as Calvin tells us, 'strained every nerve to detain me.' Calvin, who had been planning for himself a life of scholarly quietness, was urged by Farel to stay in Geneva to help in the work of reformation. It was to be anything but a quiet life.

### Severe struggles

A sensitive, retiring man, but nevertheless one of strong convictions, Calvin had already become well-known for the first edition of his famous systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Perhaps his idea was to spend much of his time studying the Scriptures, teaching, and refining this work. Certainly he did this during the succeeding decades of his life. But what was required in Geneva was clear vision and considerable courage. On the one hand there were to be pitched battles against the Roman Catholic authorities who opposed reform. On the other hand, there was trouble from powerful groups in the city who had embraced the Reformation, but who did not like the way Farel and Calvin wanted to restructure church life and worship. These latter struggles resulted in the two reformers being forced to leave the city in 1538 and spend three years in exile in Strasbourg. While there, in the company of other reformed leaders, Calvin developed many of his convictions

on reformed worship.

From 1541 until his death in 1564 he served as one of the ministers in the city; preaching frequently, lecturing midweek and teaching at the ministerial training academy that sent ministers into France to serve the reformed churches there. It was no easy work – there was less strife than before his exile in Strasbourg, but he suffered almost continuously from a number of serious medical conditions. He kept up an international correspondence with those involved in the cause of church reformation, and encouraged the many Protestant refugees who lived in Geneva during periods of persecution in their home countries. Seven years before he died he wrote a brief account of his life that touches on the 'various conflicts', 'deadly attacks' and opposition from 'profane folk, despisers of the heavenly teaching' that were his lot. He reflected that King David, who was assailed by many enemies, was of great comfort and encouragement to him.<sup>2</sup>

### Unfairly characterised

Calvin has often been depicted by his critics as a stern and even harsh man, unbending and somewhat humourless. Certainly, few of them would call him sensitive, or aware of his own weaknesses. And yet, a closer look at his writings and especially his prayers shows us this is not true. Here are some words from one of his prayers of intercession:

'...So also let us by Thy commandment  
Forget the injustices done to us  
And, in place of seeking revenge,  
Procure the good of our enemies.  
Finally, may it please Thee hereafter  
To sustain us by Thy power  
In order that we may not stumble  
By the weakness of our flesh.  
And inasmuch as we ourselves are so weak  
That we cannot remain firm  
For a minute of time...'<sup>3</sup>

### A personal faith

Similarly, when commenting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, Calvin emphasises our inner dependence upon God:

'David, who excelled both in power and riches, nevertheless frankly confessed himself to be a poor sheep, that he might have God for his shepherd. Who is there, then, amongst us, who would exempt himself from this necessity, seeing our own weakness sufficiently shows that we are more than miserable if we do not live under the protection of this shepherd? We

ought to bear in mind, that our happiness consists in this, that his hand is stretched forth to govern us, that we live under his shadow, and that his providence keeps watch and ward over our welfare. Although, therefore, we have abundance of all temporal good things, yet let us be assured that we cannot be truly happy unless God vouchsafe to reckon us among the number of his flock...'<sup>4</sup>

Calvin does not write with the syrupy sentimentalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, or with the matey casualness of our own time. He writes with the measured carefulness of one who has examined God's truth before he speaks, and who wants to convey what the Scriptures teach, no more and no less. He also knew and understood the human heart. He had a lot to say about sin, and about God's grace, and about suffering. He knew all of these, personally. He may have been the most scholarly theologian of the Reformation, but he was also a man who had experienced grief and joy, both in his own life and in that of his people.

It is this kind of man, and this kind of context, that produced our hymn, *I greet Thee, who my sure Redeemer art*. As you know, from singing the words yourselves (and probably many times) it is a careful, contemplative prayer to God. There is nothing flowery or gushy about it. There does not need to be! It is full of truth that comes from the very heart of the gospel; the truth we need to keep us going in life and in death. It is exactly the kind of hymn one can imagine a man like Calvin writing. Whether or not Calvin actually wrote it, it was written by someone who knew what it was like to be on the run from persecuting church authorities, who understood what pain fierce disputes in the church can cause, and who was convinced that anything man can throw at you is worth it – for Christ's sake. If 'A mighty fortress' was Martin Luther's signature song, then we can certainly treat this hymn as John Calvin's.

### Considering this hymn

Let us look more closely at the words. Christ's work on our behalf is the theme of the first verse, and each subsequent verse works out an application for our lives drawn from that great truth. It is a hymn of sturdy faith, one which reminds us, when we sing and pray it, that God may be totally relied upon for everything he has said he will do for us in Christ. As we sing each verse we thank God, and remind ourselves and those who sing with us, of the sure and

certain hope he has given us in Christ. It is a hymn of deep, steady, abiding trust. *Toulon*, the tune we usually sing this hymn to, was written by French Protestant composer Claude Goudimel. (Goudimel, who later died for his faith, wrote many of the tunes in the Genevan Psalter). *Toulon's* major key seems to convey the confidence of which the words speak, and matches this hymn well.

One thing to consider always with hymns is that they are poetry, and so usually, there is a lot of meaning compressed into a few words. Each word will have been carefully chosen by the writer to convey the precise meaning, or shades of meaning, he or she intended. Let's consider just a few examples from this hymn. Of course, the English version we have here is a translation from Calvin's original French, but it seems to me a good translation. It is not flattened-out or oversimplified through too bland a vocabulary.

In the first verse, the adjective 'sure' reminds us that Christ is a certain Redeemer, in whom we may trust completely. There is no doubt about the redemption he has won – it is full, perfect and sufficient, once and for all (see Hebrews Chapter 10). In the second-to-last line of that verse we sing that He did this 'for my poor sake'. 'Poor' here does not mean that I am to be pitied, or that anyone should feel sorry for me. Rather, it means that I am devoid of any worthiness; I am a hopeless case, in desperate need of salvation. He died for me 'when I was dead in my trespasses and sin.' (Ephesians 2:1)

When singing the third verse, it is well worth meditating on Calvin's choice of the word 'Life'. There is a great deal of truth conveyed in it. Christ won us eternal life through his own spotless life. He is our new life now, and our hope of life forever in heaven. But he is also a way of obedience, a path to follow. In addition, he is the source of our strength, and the sustainer of everything that lives and breathes. There is a lot of truth contained in just that one word!

Notice, in the fourth verse, the clear contrast between the 'harshness' and 'bitterness' *not* found in Christ; and the 'sweet' grace and unity that *are* the qualities of Christ and of his church. We are meant to see – in fact, to taste (these are adjectives of taste) the difference. Meditate on that, next time you sing the hymn.

Sing this hymn and let its truths strengthen your faith. Sing it, remembering Calvin, the churches of Geneva and Stras-

bourg, and their faithfulness. But most of all, sing it remembering the great God in whom they trusted so steadfastly.

#### Postscript:

Perhaps you would like to teach your children about this hymn, its writer, and its context in the Reformation. Well, there is a very good book that is written for children and teaches these very things. It is in the form of a story about an elderly English organist and his two young American friends. They travel together in Germany and France while Mr Pipes, the organist, tells the children about Reformation hymns. Chapter 11 of this book, *Mr Pipes and Psalms and Hymns of the Reformation* by Douglas Bond (Christian Liberty Press, 2000) is about Calvin and the psalms of Genevan worship, as well as about this hymn. The book is one of a series of four about Mr Pipes and these two children – and I've found them delightful, as well as very instructive. Perhaps you could think about trying them out. The other titles are: *Mr Pipes and the British Hymn Makers* (Christian Liberty Press, 1999); *Mr Pipes Comes to America* (Christian Liberty

Press, 2001) and *The Accidental Voyage* (P&R Publishing, 2005)

#### Some source material I used in writing this article:

Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1997)

Nick R. Needham, *Worship through the Ages* in Philip Graham Ryken *et al*, eds., *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (P&R, 2003), pp.375-411. (See also Hughes Oliphant Old's chapter on Calvin's theology of worship in the same volume).

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship* (John Knox Press, 1984)

#### (Endnotes)

- 1 Song found in the New Testament, eg The Magnificat in Luke 1, or Simeon's song in Luke 2.
- 2 Calvin, "Preface to the Psalms", in Ford Lewis Battles, trans. and ed., *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1978), pp. 34-5.
- 3 *ibid.*, pp. 122-3
- 4 *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms* (P&R Publishing, 1999), p.73

## Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

### Avondale

Family prayer & praise items: Congratulations to Ben and Rosalie, Emma, Max and Naomi Welch on the safe arrival of their son and brother, Riley, on Wednesday morning. For the technically minded, Riley weighed in at 3.96kg and has dark wavy hair. We thank and praise God for this miracle of new life and ask for wisdom and strength for Ben and Rosalie, so that Riley too may be raised according to His way.

### Buckland's Beach

Session report. Our session will be approaching Auckland Presbytery with a

recommendation that steps be taken to explore the possibility and ways of enabling br Andre Scheepers to enter into the ministry of the Word and sacraments in our churches. We are recommending that an approach be made to the Vicariate Committee to see if our brother could serve as a vicar in one of our churches in 2009. We are thankful for this development.

### Christchurch

From Pastor John. This morning it's our delight to witness the baptism of Iain and Anna Begg's baby, Sasha. What an encouragement it is to know that our God is the God of believing parents and their children. By means of this sacrament we welcome little Sasha into our church community. We also extend a special welcome to Iain and Anna's family as they join them for this great occasion.

I'm fast coming to the conclusion that The Press is not very favourably disposed to Christians. Some recent articles have deeply disturbed me. I wrote a letter in

response to one article but they only published my opening lines and dropped my suggestion that this society will only sort itself out as it returns to God's moral standards for humanity. Today it's not politically correct to say that.

This From Pastor John. This morning it's our privilege to welcome the Rev. Leo de Vos as our guest preacher. Leo is in Christchurch in connection with the examination of André Holtslag. He was kind enough to accede to our request to fill our pulpit for us this morning. Session was keen for this to happen as Leo is one of the pastors on our short list for calling. May the Lord bless Leo's ministry of the Word in our midst today. This morning I'll be leading the Dovedale congregation in worship and this evening we'll pick up on our ongoing study of The Beatitudes.

Finally, a follow up on my lament about The Press in last Sunday's bulletin. My letter was finally published in its entirety after lodging a complaint about the way my letter was "gutted" in the first publication.

### Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. By the time you read this you will know the result of Mr Holtslag's presbytery exam. I have been asked a little about this exam, its necessity, method and timing so I thought I'd take a few lines to explain one or two of these things. Why the exam? The Presbytery desire, and are required by our churches, to do as much as they are able to ensure that ministers are sound in doctrine, able to preach, and exhibit love for the Lord, His Word and His people. The Presbytery exam is one of the ways in which this is determined. Why another exam when Mr Holtslag has recently been examined in Pukekohe? The second exam is more comprehensive. Further, the church court (Presbytery) that has responsibility for endorsing the call a congregation has proceeded with, rightly has the duty to do its own investigation of a minister. Why, then, call a man and go through so many of the processes without first having all the approvals in place? It is impractical for every potential candidate to be examined by the presbytery before they are called. Thus, men usually begin their ministry in their new congregation before they have been examined by the Presbytery. Though men may not pass on their first attempt, it is unusual for candidates to ultimately not get past this second exam unless they have changed substantially in their doctrine, preaching philosophy or the

like. This is not to minimize the difficulty or seriousness of the exam, and the considerable amount of preparation required – but it keeps in perspective the nature of the evening. There is no desire on the part of examiners to be obtuse or make it more difficult than it needs to be – but it does need to be probing enough to make an evaluation meaningful. What happens if a man doesn't pass his Presbytery exam? Usually the Presbytery would schedule a repeat at some suitable, future time. He would normally continue to preach and conduct his pastoral duties until that exam. Further, the Session and Presbytery (and congregation) would make every effort to ensure that as much encouragement and tangible help would be given to assist in preparing for the next exam. Obviously, I have only scratched the surface of these questions and not given comprehensive answers. If you have any questions please ask one of the elders.

We all know of Mr Holtslag's pending arrival, and his passing of the Presbytery exam. Praise God for that! His ordination (DV) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August is an exciting service for us to look forward to. Dr Paul Archbald, minister of the Reformed Church of Silverstream, has very kindly agreed to lead us in this service. Mr Holtslag is from Silverstream, and in God's providence the Silverstream congregation have been intimately involved in his preparation for ministry at many levels, so we are privileged to have Dr Archbald come and officiate at his ordination. After the service, which is scheduled to begin at 11am, we Dovedalers will be hosting a lunch at the church for all who come.

### Dunedin

Peacemaking Seminar. An invitation has been received from the Grace Bible Church to a Peacemaking Seminar to be held on Saturday 9 August from 9 am to 4:15 pm. The brochure states, "This seminar on biblical peacemaking is designed to equip Christians to resolve conflict in a biblically faithful manner. As all Christians are called to be peacemakers, this seminar is appropriate for every Christian." Brochures are available on the table in the hall. Registrations are due by 31 July and entry is free.

### Foxton

Report Session Meeting Monday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008. Session received a very positive report from the Deputies for the Reformed Theological College with regards

br Craig van Echten. Craig continues to make good progress in his studies and is highly regarded by students and faculty members alike. He is very involved in the local church of South Barwon, where he is a member.

### Hamilton

Andrew Dickson – Involvement in Uganda Mission work. For some time now, Session been working with Andrew Dickson towards his involvement with mission work with the OPC in Mbale, Uganda. Session (in conjunction with National Diaconate and the OMB) endorses Andrew's placement there and, as a congregation, we have set aside \$7,000 towards this in the current financial year. The National Diaconate Committee has set aside a similar amount and it is anticipated that the OMB and the OPC will both also support this work financially. Andrew will speak on his proposed work at the Missions Evening (see notice elsewhere) on Wednesday so that the congregation can have a better understanding of what is envisaged. Since Andrew's work is primarily diaconal, it is desirable for him to go to the field as an ordained deacon. Session therefore presents Andrew Dickson as a single nomination for the office of deacon in view of his future involvement in diaconal mission work for the OPC in Uganda. If there are no objections, voting will take place on Sunday 20 July.

### Hastings

Kid's movie afternoon. Come along to the church this Tuesday afternoon at 1.30pm to watch "Charlottes Web" on the big screen. Afternoon tea provided! Please bring a gold coin to cover costs. See you there!!

### Hukanui

Pastoral: With thanks and praise to God we rejoice with Sebastiaan and Sarah Vos at the birth of Erwin Rene, born last Sunday morning (8<sup>th</sup>). May God grant you wisdom and strength in leading and guiding your growing family in His ways. Lord willing, Erwin will receive the sign and seal of the covenant in baptism on Sunday morning the 6<sup>th</sup> July. (That Sunday is also our regular shared lunch, so be encouraged to plan to bring extra, as a number of visitors are expected!)

We officially welcomed last Sunday Christo and Carine Allers, and their daughters Louisanne and Denique, as members, who have been worshipping with us for some months now. We pray that you will continue to feel at home in our midst and be a bless-

ing for us as we serve God together.

Readers Seminar: To lead in worship is a big responsibility: but to be there and listen is just as important! That is why session will be holding a seminar that will consider, not just what is involved in leading a reading service, but also what is central to a biblical service and sermon, and what to look for when evaluating and considering both the message preached and the content and structure of a worship service. This seminar will be held on Monday the 30<sup>th</sup> June, here at the church, starting at 7:30 pm. Please make an extra effort to be there, especially you men in our congregation! RN.

**Masterton**

Pastoral Notes. Today we say farewell to Jan Erik and Gina Stolte and family. They leave on Wednesday for America where Jan Erik will begin his studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Before they arrive in America the family will say their goodbyes to family in Auckland and Australia. The Stoltes will arrive in America on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August. We send them with our well wishes and prayers that the Lord may grant safety

and strength for this new endeavour. There will be a shared plate lunch following the morning worship service.

**Nelson**

Church notices. Help! We are searching for the oldest photo available of the first Cadet Club year(s). Some were around 1966. If you have one please contact Marianne Draijer.

Church notices. Short term Pulpit Supply Rev Barry James has responded positively to our request for him to serve as an interim pastor. He and his wife Anne will arrive in Nelson around the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, and stay till the end of October. They will require accommodation for that period, so if any one knows of any furnished accommodation that may be available please let me know this week or alternative arrangements will have to be made promptly. Ewout

Notes of Session Admin Meeting held 15th July 2008. Rev Bruce Hoyt will be preaching in Nelson on Sunday 24th August on invitation from the Calling Committee. Rev Sjirk Bajema has offered his services on Sunday 10th August which will be preparation for

Lord's Supper and Rev Goris will conduct Lord's Supper on Sunday 17th August 2008. Br Les Chapman from the Reformed Church of Christchurch has kindly offered his services and will be taking the morning Service on Sunday 3rd August.

**Palmerston North**

Revelations on YouTube. Thanks to the computer savvy among us the studies on "Revelations" by Rev Michael Flinn are now available online at You-Tube. Study number one has been uploaded and hopefully there will be more to follow. All you need to do is type in [www.youtube.com/rcpnz](http://www.youtube.com/rcpnz) and download the video.

From a Strictly mathematical viewpoint:

What equals 100%?

What does it mean to give MORE than 100%?

Ever wonder about those people who say they are giving more than 100%?

We all have been in situations where someone wants you to give over 100%.

How about achieving 101%?

What equals 100% in life.

Questions:

If:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S  
T U V W X Y Z

Is represented as:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15  
16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26.

Then:

H-A-R-D-W-O-R-K

$8+1+18+4+23+15+18+11 = 98\%$

And

K-N-O-W-L-E-D-G-E

$11+14+15+23+12+5+4+7+5 = 96\%$

But,

A-T-T-I-T-U-D-E

$1+20+20+9+20+21+4+5 = 100\%$

And Look how far the love of God will take you!!


L-O-V-E O-F G-O-D

$12+15+22+5+15+6+7+15+4 = 101\%$

Therefore, one can conclude with mathematical certainty that:

While Hard work and Knowledge will get you close, and a good Attitude will get you there, it's the Love of God that will put you over the top!

*Calling all country boys and girls to become*



**NETWORKERS**

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

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

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

**INTERESTED?**

*Then write to me –*  
**Eddie van Leeuwen, 40 Victors Road**  
**Hoon Hay, CHRISTCHURCH**

## Pukekohe

Peter Haverland will profess his faith in the morning service on Sunday 20 July. After the service the young people of the church are invited to the Haverlands home for lunch to give thanks to God for this glad occasion and to celebrate Peter's 18th birthday.

Grace Theological College is offering a course called Introduction to Pastoral Counselling in the second semester of 2008, on Thursdays evenings, 7 – 9pm. This class begins July 24 and runs till the end of the year, with a two week break in October. It will be held at our Manukau campus, 75 Rogers Road, Manurewa. You can come and just sit in, or you can do the assignments and gain credit. \$200 for the semester if you are just sitting in (with books an optional extra). \$400 for the semester, plus textbooks, if you wish to study for credit. Your lecturer will be the College Principal, Peter Reynolds, assisted by his wife. Call the College on 268 1469 or email us at enquiries@gtc.ac.nz., or talk to Peter Reynolds. See you there!

Melinda Watson met with the Session last Tuesday to discuss her desire to profess her faith and join the church as a member. The Session was very happy for her to do so and this will take place on Sunday 24 August in the morning service.

## Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks for the well-attended Holiday Bible Club. About 80 children were present overall, an increase from last time. The children were from a variety of backgrounds. Again, parents were very encouraging in their comments about the programme. Many were back from last year, and many assured us they'd be back again next year if we do this again. We pray that the Lord may use this for good, according to His purposes.

Pastoral Notes. Last Friday Rev. Archbald attended a luncheon with the Christian group in Upper Hutt College. Quite a few students turned up. Hopefully there will soon be opportunity to lead a study there. Please pray that the Lord may use this contact for good, according to His purposes.

50th Wedding Anniversary. Henk and Alie de Ruiter are celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary on Saturday 19th July 2008 DV. The family wish to invite the congregation to an Open Home from 1.30 till 4.00pm at 40 Sunbrae Drive, Silverstream. Henk and Alie request no gifts but would rather appreciate a donation - To Help a Child Foundation.

## Short Report of the Meeting of Presbytery Christchurch held on 11–12 July 2008

The delegates gathered at the Reformed Church of Dovedale on Friday evening for the examination of Vicar Andre Holtslag. His sermon on Psalm 146 and oral examination were both sustained with the concurrence of synodical examiners Revs Dirk van Garderen and Leo de Vos.

On Saturday the moderator, Rev Robert van Wichen, opened the meeting with a reading from Hebrews 10:19–25 observing how presbytery meetings provide opportunity 'to spur one another on towards love and good deeds'.

The additional supplementary Church Order Article 47 questions 'Are there any issues that disturb the peace and unity of the congregation?' and 'Are there any issues that trouble the relationships between minister, session and congregation?' were proposed for consideration of sessions for approval at the next meeting.

In response to the Article 47 questions, Nelson delegates reported that their three elders were very busy in meeting the needs of the congregation. They have been blessed by the occasional preaching ministry of Rev John Goris who, with a number of other visiting ministers, have supplemented reading services. The congregation is benefiting from good fellowship at home groups. The search for a new minister continues.

Dovedale delegates told of well-attended meetings that were being held for

potential officebearers. Mission work is well supported, also financially. They have been richly blessed by Rev Martin Geluk's recent short-term ministry and are grateful for the opportunity of pulpit exchanges with RC Christchurch elders for reading services. Delight was expressed at the prospect of Vicar Andre Holtslag as their new minister.

Bishopdale delegates informed of the congregation's active support for missions, with three members serving in other countries. Other avenues for outreach include teaching English to immigrants and the Drug Arm ministry. Fellowship groups have been blessed with studies in Nehemiah. There have been four recent professions of faith as well as a number of men considering studying for the ministry. In view of the heavy pastoral workload the search for a second minister continues.

Bishopdale delegates also reported on planning for the International Conference of Reformed Churches' conference to be held in Christchurch in October 2009. One hundred international conference delegates are expected to attend, with volunteer organisers arranging venue and accommodation.

OMB liaison, Ed Havelaar, reported on recent mission activities. The meeting also heard of Timothy and Zara Woo, of Dunedin, who have lately begun work in Ndola, Zambia, where Timothy works as the librarian of the Theological College of Central Africa.

Presbytery again grappled with how best to comply with the Church Order's requirement that at least one church visitor at each visitation must be a minister. It had been agreed at the previous meeting that vacant churches should seek assistance from ministers from other presbyteries when making visitations. Presbytery stopped short of approving or disapproving a proposal that a visiting minister from a sister church assist in conducting a church visitation. The question was eventually referred back to the enquiring church.

## Family Camp

One of the unique blessings of Family Camp is the time of rich spiritual blessing received through the devotions in the morning and evening each day.

This year will be no exception. Rev Peter Kloosterman will be leading the morning studies on the theme "In Christ Alone" based on Philippians 2:1-11. There is a

Advertise your  
Happenings and  
Church events in



wedding day planned! This is a marriage arranged from eternity. We will look at the Bible's picture of the Bridegroom and the preparation of the Bride. You will see that this is a match that could only be made in Heaven.

The studies will be accompanied by group discussion where the young people and us

who are not so young get together and share our insights on the Lord's Word.

The evening devotions will be taken by Rev Michael Flinn who has chosen for his topic, "The Theology of the Psalms". What are the Royal Psalms? Have you ever considered what the Psalms say about the church?

Attend this year's family camp at Finlay Park to find out.

The dates are from 27 December 08 – 3 January 09

Look out for registration forms arriving at your church.

## Missions in focus

by Janice Reid



Andrew Dickson

# Introducing Andrew Dickson ... Missionary Deacon to Uganda

by Rosalind Cressy

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand are continuing their cooperation with one of our sister churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA), in its Mbale mission in Uganda. A number of our denomination have served in this mission over the last ten years, the most recent being the visit of Rev and Mrs Rogers last year. An opportunity has arisen for a missionary deacon to assist the mission. Andrew Dickson from the Reformed Church of Hamilton has been appointed by the OPC to fill this role. Who is Andrew and what will he be doing as a missionary deacon?

Raised on a Waikato dairy farm, Andrew became interested in foreign countries by his parents' interest in supporting missionaries and through them employing foreign workers. After graduating from Massey

University with a Bachelor of Agriculture, Andrew managed dairy farms while working part-time for Youth For Christ, Waikato. His first work overseas was with Volunteer Service Abroad as an advisor for rural development projects for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania. For three years he enjoyed the challenge of speaking Swahili, living without electricity and phone and driving on hazardous roads. He stayed on in-country by starting a timberyard and furniture-making business where for 2 years he learnt of the hazards of the often corrupt, business scene. Moving to West Kilimanjaro, he managed a 1000ha farm for a Dutch export-seed company for 3.5yrs. He returned to New Zealand because he felt called by God to study at Grace Theological College (GTC) from 2005-2007. Apart from studying to grow in wisdom and understanding, he hoped that God would use his theological training to

prepare him for returning some day to an East African ministry that would help build the church up in reaching rural communities for Christ in an holistic way.

In 2006 God brought the OPC's Mbale mission (OPUM) to Andrew's attention through the Reformed Churches of NZ which he joined in 2005. After much emailing, waiting on the Lord and visiting the mission for a month in January 2007, his application to work with OPUM as a missionary deacon was accepted. Since finishing at GTC last year Andrew has been employed in various casual jobs while preparing to go to Uganda.

The goal of the OPUM is to be Christ's agents partnering with Ugandans to grow an indigenous self-sustaining, self-governing, self-propagating church. To this end those teaching at Knox Theological College (KTC) in Mbale seek to raise the level of spiritual leadership and pastoral ability of local pastors and elders so that they become more selfless and true to following Christ in serving their churches and families.

Andrew's role as a missionary deacon will include finding practical ways to enable congregations to sustain themselves, both in terms of supporting their Minister of

### **Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you!**

If you or somebody you know is planning a mission trip—short or long—please let us know. We want to pray for those on mission trips overseas, but we cannot pray if we don't know that you're going! Deadline for submission of articles to Faith in Focus is 6 weeks before the month the magazine comes to your church. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at [reid4radio@gmail.com](mailto:reid4radio@gmail.com)



the Word, so he is able to concentrate on pastoral work, and in becoming able to meet their own diaconal needs. Lord willing, he will also work to enable KTC students to improve and develop their farming and/or other income-generating skills. He will also oversee the development of the KTC property. So far this has been beyond the reach of those teaching theology due to the constraints of time, resources and

their own gifts and experience.

Since Andrew made his initial desires known, the session of the Reformed Church of Hamilton has been working with him towards involvement in mission work with OPUM. The session fully endorses Andrew's desire to do this work and sees this as an exciting development in the RCNZ's partnership with this mission in Uganda. Andrew has been ordained as a deacon in view of

his proposed work. It is anticipated that Andrew's financial support will be shared between the Hamilton church, the National Diaconate, the Overseas Mission Board and the OPC (USA). Andrew's participation in the OPUM's work will be reviewed after an initial one-year period and, all being well, this will become a permanent placement.

## Reviews in focus

### Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons.

Edited by Michael Brown.  
*Published by Reformed Fellowship*

Twelve authors have contributed to this valuable resource for training elders and deacons. The authors, ministers and professors in the United Reformed Churches in North America, have carefully explained the duties and responsibilities of elders and deacons, including practical suggestions on topics ranging from how to conduct a meeting efficiently to why it is important for the elder to know and defend Reformed doctrine. This book includes an excellent historical overview of the development of the Reformed churches from the Reforma-

tion to today; specific advice on dealing with potential church members who do not yet understand covenant theology and infant baptism; and a study guide with coordinated lessons from Scripture, the confessions, and each chapter of this book. It is clear that the authors consider the calling of elders and deacons to be significant. They encourage diligence on the part of elders and deacons to fill worthily the offices Christ has ordained. Contributing authors: John A. Bouwers, Michael G. Brown, W. Robert Godfrey, Michael S. Horton, Daniel R. Hyde, Nelson Kloosterman, Randal S. Lankheet, Bradd L. Nymeyer, Ralph Pontier, Kim Riddlebarger, Derrick J. Vander Meulen, Cornelis P. Venema.

*This description of the book was taken from [www.balsinger.org/OPC/Library](http://www.balsinger.org/OPC/Library)*

#### One review

Following is a review that appeared on the Amazon website:

*Called to Serve is an excellent resource not only for training officers in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, but also for expanding one's own understanding of the New Testament's teaching on the subject of ministers, elders, and deacons.*

*Though the book is written by and for officers in churches within the Dutch Reformed tradition, I would highly recommend it for use in PCA (the denomination in which I pastor), OPC, and other Presbyterian denominations as well.*

*One of the best and most challenging chapters, written by editor Michael Brown, addresses the question of whether people with baptistic theology should be allowed to join Reformed churches. Though the Dutch Reformed answer this question differently than do Presbyterians (the former say "no," the latter "yes"), this question is nonethe-*

*less a crucial one with which all potential officers should wrestle, regardless of their denominations' take on this issue.*

*As a church planter in the Presbyterian Church in America I am in the process of training elders and deacons, and after having searched far and wide for quality curricula, I was thrilled to come across this well-written and accessible volume. I commend it highly.*

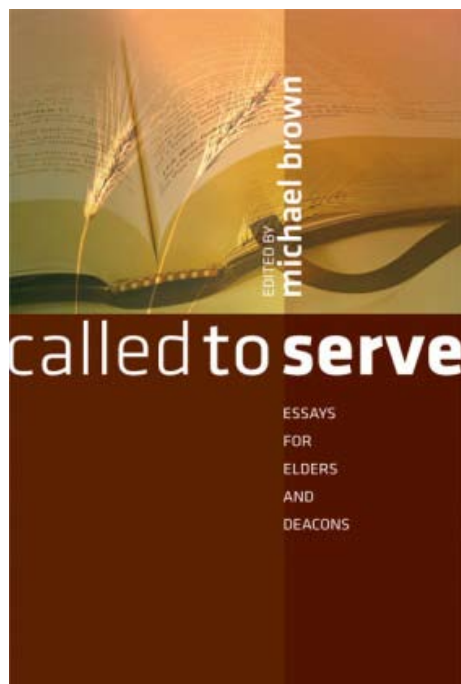
*Rev. Jason J. Stellman  
Exile Presbyterian Church  
Woodinville, WA, USA.*

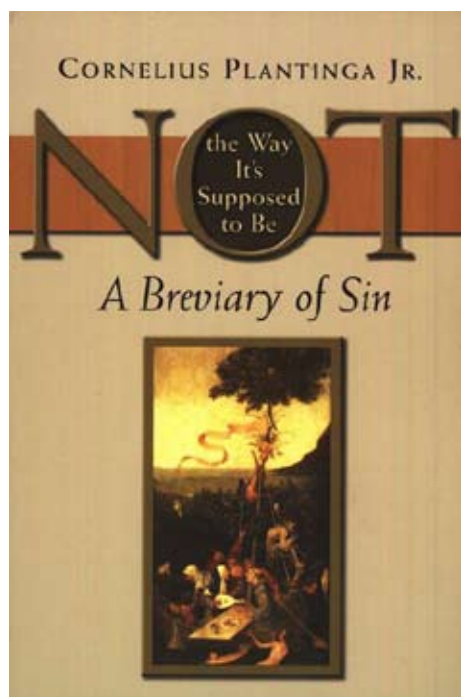
### 'A Breviary of Sin' by Cornelius Plantinga Jr

*Reviewed by Andy Vosslander*

Winter 'flus tend to come around with seasonal regularity and this winter was no exception. Although I had to spend six days doing very little during my dose, I did manage to get some reading done. I picked up this book by Cornelius Plantinga, which my good husband had recently purchased, and was hooked.

Many of us, of course, are hooked into sin. Plantinga's concern is that we live in an age where the word 'sin' conjures up images of dessert menus where the measure is calorific rather than moral. This understanding is not limited to the secular world. Plantinga notes that whereas churches used to preach against, abhor, and confess sin, Christians are now likely to be encouraged to 'confess our problem with human relational adjustment dynamics, and





especially our feebleness in networking’.

In order to bring sin and its seriousness back into the spotlight, Plantinga aims to ‘renew the knowledge of a persistent reality that used to evoke in us fear, hatred, and grief’. The audience targeted in his book is not theologians but lay people, both Christian and non-Christian. Many contemporary examples are used to illustrate his thesis. Plantinga combines stories from the Bible, Augustine, and the Puritans with crime stories, the movies, television, and the newspaper to provide contemporary and engaging examples.

The book begins and ends with a Biblical understanding of sin. Sin is defined, and then its corruption of what is good and the spread of that corruption is described. The parasitic quality of sin is discussed along with the ironies and pretenses generated by it. Sin is compared with folly and addic-

tion. The book concludes with a description of a couple of the classic ‘postures’ or movements of sin – attack and flight. Finally, there is a reminder of the pure beauty of grace that is brought into sharp relief once a true consciousness of sin has been explored.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is concerned about the problem of sin, whether in their own lives or in the wider world. The book is full of wisdom from numerous sources (Plantinga is a prodigious quoter), and is eminently readable. The many contemporary illustrations bring time-honoured truths right into the present, which makes for a personally challenging read. I enjoyed this book while suffering the results of original sin. I’m sure others could derive even greater profit from it if they read it while healthy.

## The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

**The CGKN**

### **Dirk van Garderen**

The CGKN is one of our eldest sisters. Our special ties go back to our first synod in July 1953, when it was decided to seek to establish a sister relationship with them. This was formally ratified a few years later.

Direct contact between us has always remained limited. The first time formal face-to-face contact took place was in 1983 when our denomination’s stated clerk, Mr Dick Vanderpyl, attended and addressed the CGKN synod in Rotterdam. This led to the CGKN’s Rev Paul den Butter visiting our synod at Silverstream (1989). Fifteen years later the Rev Dirk van der Zwaag was delegated to attend our synod in Hamilton (2005). Apart from that, contact has been maintained by means of the exchange of our respective Acts of Synod and denominational magazines.<sup>1</sup>

Our Interchurch Relations Committee had encouraged me to make contact when in the Netherlands at the Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt

(GKV). Providentially, I was scheduled to stay with a boyhood friend who lives in Veenendaal, the heartland of the CGKN. Their denominational offices are located there. So is the Rev van der Zwaag, who serves one of the two large CGKN congregations in town.

### **Common involvement**

I first went to the ‘dienstbureau’ where I met and discussed international mission and diaconal work with the Rev Ge Drayer, related to the Drayer family here in New Zealand. The purpose of our meeting was to determine areas of common involvement by our respective denominations. I found that most of their work is focused on Africa. Our church’s presence is limited to cooperation with the work undertaken by the Orthodox Presbyterian Uganda Mission – an area where CGKN is not involved. Both our denominations are involved in radio ministry in Indonesia. Contact between Janice Reid and their team was encouraged. The CGKN gives some financial support to C.A.R.E. (India) in their ‘truckers’ stop’

ministry. We found that, at this point of time, opportunities and openings for joint ventures are limited.

My second meeting was more informal and relaxed. I went to the home of the Rev van der Zwaag where we spent a very informative few hours learning about each other’s churches. The CGKN, established in 1834, is not a large denomination. It has approximately 50,000 members scattered throughout the Netherlands.

### **Main ‘streams’ in denomination**

The Rev van der Zwaag pointed to three main ‘streams’ (stroomingen) that may be discerned within the denomination. On one side there are those who are very much akin to the GKV in worship style and practice. They are very open to forming closer relationships with their sister church both denominationally and locally. At the other end of the spectrum there is a very strident group which expresses itself in a very traditional, formal manner. They were described as being rather inward looking and having little interest



Rev Dirk van der Zwaag outside the new CGKN in Veenendaal

in forming ecumenical bonds, desiring only to maintain the traditional *status quo*. The largest stream is comprised of those who are somewhere in between. These folks want to maintain the distinctive traditional, Calvinistic piety of their forebears but also somehow to become more relevant to and involved with other reformed/confessional churches. There is also evidence of what could be seen as a 'fourth column'. This is the growing

influence and impact of *Evangelise Omroep (EO)*, a parachurch ministry that is highly visible and influential by means of its weekly singing-centred televised services. This organisation brings with it a much more Arminian and North American-style, semi-charismatic influence. It does more than simply challenge traditional worship practices. Its popular theology tends to marginalise and obscures the distinctives of the reformed faith. My impression is

that the internal tensions in the CGKN will continue into the foreseeable future.

#### **Ecumenically**

I asked about the ecumenical strategy of the CGKN. The Rev van der Zwaag described it for me as consisting of four tiers.

He pointed out that, the above-mentioned tensions notwithstanding, the main ecumenical focus is on the Netherlands itself. There are continuing discussions with the GKV and, to a lesser extent, with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) — the denomination established in the 1960s as a result of a split in the GKV. However, actual progress is limited.

The second tier is a focus on Europe, with confessional Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the UK and across the continent. These churches are, in the main, small and struggling.

The third tier is with churches with whom they have traditional and historical ties, including our churches in New Zealand. That contact seems to me to be very nominal.

Fourthly, there is the contact established and maintained via the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

## Locally

I asked about the life and worship at the local congregational level. The average size of CGKN congregations is about 250. Worship style varies considerably from place to place. Photos and descriptions of services described in *Doorgeven* seem very similar and at times more informal than ours. My experience with CGKN churches is limited to those in what is called the 'Bible Belt' of the Netherlands. About 20 years ago I led a service in *Bunschoten/Spakenburg*. They were building a second church at the time, because the one congregation was bursting at the seams. The Bible used was the 'Staten Bijbel' (equivalent of the King James Version) and the songs were almost exclusively traditional Genevan versions of psalms sung in what are commonly called 'whole' (4 beat) notes. Singing three verses at any one time is the limit!

In Veenendaal there are two exceptionally large CGKN congregations. *Bethel* is the larger of the two with in excess of 2,000 members. It is regarded as more 'progressive' liturgically and holding its

own. The other congregation, *Pniel*, is smaller (1,400 members) and very traditional. Any changes made, no matter how slight, are major issues. For example, not so long ago the traditional way of singing was changed from singing 'whole' notes to 'whole and half' ones. This was enough to bring about a mini-revolt leading to about 50 members now worshipping elsewhere in order to sing as they have always done.

The Pniel congregation was due to move into a brand new church in July. I visited it and stood in awe at this \$(NZ)10,000,000 complex that is able to seat up to 900 worshippers. What a magnificent facility. Why a new complex for the members of Pniel? Commercial developers wanted the old (more central) site. The pressure to sell had been enormous. Positively, a new, spacious, comfortable and user-friendly building encourages fresh new initiatives. Huge apartment complexes are in plain view of the new church. The harvest fields beckon.

As Br van der Zwaag and I enthused over the building, I sensed a real co-nundrum – one that is as real for us

in New Zealand as for this fellowship in Veenendaal. I asked if traditions will get in the way of genuine outreach to their new neighbours. The town is growing phenomenally. But these newcomers are from the rest of the radically secularised Netherlands and, even more visibly, are the children of those who came from Morocco and Turkey a generation ago. How to reach them? While traditions are designed to keep the faithful comfortably *in*, they are even more effective in keeping the unsaved *out*. The tension between feeding the faithful and reaching the lost is real. How do you do both? I thought of our facilities back in New Zealand and saw the same challenge.

*The Rev. Dirk van Garderen is a member of our Interchurch Relations Committee and the minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach*

- 1 Two come to mind: *De Wekker* and the beautifully presented mission/diaconal/evangelism quarterly, *Doorgeven*.



*The front of the church. The surrounding housing estate is the new field for harvest.*