



RTC Monthly

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College News

- The new students at the beginning of this second semester have helped create a bit more of a buzz around the College buildings. We are thankful for the way they have settled into College life – not only lectures but also cell groups, devotions, discipleship pairs and social life.
- This semester we will be joined by a visiting lecturer for a one-week intensive block. Dr Johann Joubert, pastor of the Ulverstone CRC and involved in counselling ministry, will lead an intensive lecture week on pastoral counselling at the end of September.

Preaching Workshop

We are just six weeks out from our annual preaching workshop. This year's theme is *Preaching the Kingdom* and will allow the RTC lecturers to address various aspects of preaching with a Kingdom world and life view. Please join us in praying for good enrolments and a workshop that will be an encouragement and help to many preachers. Please note too that many non-preachers have enjoyed these workshops – elders and keen church members have found them biblically and spiritually stimulating. So even if you're not a preacher, you might like to join us for the two days.

If you haven't received enrolment forms, please contact the RTC office.

Strategic Planning

The Board of the College has recently initiated a strategic planning process as we prepare for the next five years. A small workgroup is producing a paper that addresses changes in direction and focus that are needed as we seek to minister to changing church situations, and as churches seek to address a rapidly changing society. This paper will be presented at the November Board meeting.

Some of the issues being considered are:

- the need to prepare people for many diversified forms of ministry in addition to the pastoral preaching ministry
- the need to provide training that reflects the urgency of mission in a post-modern, post-Christendom culture
- the desire for more flexible delivery modes so that more training can be done in a student's home church
- the need to retain clear Reformed theological distinctives, especially those that cannot be found in other Australian theological colleges
- the need to find suitable lecturers for the years ahead when a number of the current faculty will retire
- the need to find ways of increasing student numbers

Faculty News

- In June Dr Bill Berends had a rapid tour through a number of churches in New Zealand and also attended the South Pacific Association of Bible Colleges Conference held in Auckland.
- Murray Capill went to Perth late June for a weekend of ministry. He led an elder's retreat for the Perth Session on Team Leadership.
- Four of the faculty members were able to attend the CRCA Ministers and Wives' conference in Sydney last week, and Murray gave the morning expositions there from 2 Corinthians 2 – 5. It was encouraging to see the denomination focusing on its mission task – a task that we as a College want to equip our students to contribute to in a focused and skilled way.
- In September, Dr Henk de Waard will be attending a meeting in Sydney with the Presbyterian Church and the World Reformed Fellowship. Later that day he will attend the opening of the National Assembly of the PCA and the induction of their new moderator, Rev. R. Benn, who will be our Graduation speaker here at the RTC in November.

Book Corner...

John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance* (IVP, 2002).

This is one of four books in which Piper draws spiritual lessons from the lives of great leaders and pastors of the past. In this one he focuses on the lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce. He introduces each person with a brief biographical sketch which is helpful if you don't know that much about these men. His main concern, however, is not with their life story but with what enabled them to persevere in their callings despite incredible trials and opposition. In each case he shows that the root of their endurance was a deep and abiding relationship with Christ.

The book makes for challenging and stimulating reading. Easy to read and spiritually profitable, this is a great book for anyone called to endurance in the work God has called them to do – and surely that is all of us!

Ministry Spot...

(by Dr. Murray Capill)

Increasingly Reformed Churches are having to ask hard questions about our traditional model of eldership. There are signs that all is not well. Fewer and fewer churches can find enough men for eldership, let alone the seeming luxury of putting up duos (twice as many men as required so the congregation can make a choice). An increasing number of people do not find an annual home visit very adequate as an expression of pastoral care and they are not about to open up spiritually to someone they barely know. And men in eldership are often crazily busy. Many work long hours and have families caught up in the frenzy of 21st century living. They find it hard to make their time stretch to eldership alongside everything else. Very often not even the annual home visit is being done.

What do we do? It seems foolish to just ask everyone to pedal harder. Something needs to change. One change that should lead the way is to recognize that not all

churches may solve the problem in the same way. There may not be a one size fits all solution. Since the New Testament doesn't spell out a set model for pastoral care there is room for variety. We need to give each other latitude to address our particular situation, while holding strongly to basic biblical principles.

In view of that, I'd like to suggest in this and the next edition or two of *RTC Monthly* some ways in which churches might address these issues.

The first change churches may consider is to re-define the shepherding role of elders. Many churches will want to retain the model of each elder being responsible for a certain group of people within the congregation – what we might call a mini-flock. Typically an elder has been responsible for between 10 and 20 families. This model requires churches to have enough elders to ensure the entire congregation is covered pastorally without eldership groups being too large. It is interesting to note that Perimeter Church in Georgia, Atlanta, a large Presbyterian church, is committed to this principle and they have around 230 elders! A subset of nine elders, elected from the pastoral eldership body, serves as "ruling elders" for three year terms. So not all 230 are in Session meetings, but they are active as a shepherds of the flock.

If mini-flocks are used in either a large or small church what should the pastoral role of the elder be? There is no fixed answer, but I would suggest three strategies that could be used in place of (or in some cases alongside) the annual home visit.

First, the elder majors on brief, informal contact with his flock. He makes a point of chatting with them at church, he may see them in a small group, he extends hospitality to them, he phones them, sends an email, meets someone for coffee, etc. He seeks to build relationship with them. It is possible for an elder to touch base with his mini-flock reasonably frequently in these ways. People then have a basic relationship with an elder who they know cares about them, giving them someone to turn to when need arises.

Second, the elder ensures that the people in his mini-flock are integrated into the network of church relationships and ministries. He knows he can't provide all the care for them but he can ensure they are being cared for. Are they in a small group as a place of primary pastoral care? Are the deacons aware of a diaconal need? Can a person be found to mentor this young guy? Can a place be found to use this person's gifts? An elder who actively links his people into the life and ministries of the church does more for them than one who pays a one-off visit with a fairly formal agenda.

Thirdly, the elder makes some pastoral visits. When someone in his group is going through a crisis, or has a special prayer need, or needs to be encouraged or challenged spiritually, the elder will call on them. The visit may be brief and focussed. It is not the main source of pastoral care - that may come from a pastoral care team or a home group. But the elder shows spiritual care by such visits. James 5 also indicates that people should feel free to call the elders for prayer.

These three strategies are useful ways for elders to be shepherds of mini-flocks. When this is the model used, they should be freed from nearly all other responsibilities so they can do this well. It is a noble task.

But next time we'll consider what a church should do if it can't find enough elders to have effective mini-flocks operating, or if it wants to consider alternative models.