



RTC Monthly

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College News

- There are only two lecture weeks left before study week and exams. Please remember the students as they come to the "business end" of the semester.
- We look forward to the annual College dinner this Friday when students and staff will again enjoy an evening of good food and entertainment. Another special dinner will be held on 22nd November to mark the retirement of our Principal, Dr Henk de Waard. Henk has served as Principal for 11 years and has been a lecturer at the College since 1981. We look forward to this evening of reflection on his significant contribution to the College and many other areas of ministry.

Preaching Workshop

Around 90 people attended the sixth annual RTC preaching workshop. We had attendees from New Zealand, Indonesia, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT, as well as many from Victoria. It is also encouraging to see people coming from a range of different denominations.

Faculty members addressed different aspects of what it means to preach the Kingdom. We were reminded that preaching the Kingdom means preaching that Christ is King. It means remembering that his Kingdom is vast, and our preaching ought to draw large pictures of the scope of gospel work. It means stressing that he is a King of righteousness and justice, and his people must stand for righteousness and justice in the world. His Kingdom is not only growing like a mustard seed, but permeating this world, like yeast in dough. Preaching the Kingdom means urging people to make a difference in the world around them. And the Kingdom demands a distinctive lifestyle – Kingdom people must live with a distinctive ethic that will make them salt and light in this decaying and dark world. These and many other themes, will hopefully serve to broaden and enrich the preaching of those who came.

Faculty News

The preaching workshop was the main event on the faculty's mind over the last month. But a few other activities are now on the horizon. Murray Capill will be speaking on "Preaching Pastorally" at a preaching conference in Newcastle at the end of October, and leading a church camp for the Sutherland CRC the first weekend of November. He'll also be heading to New Zealand at the end of November to visit Reformed churches in the North Island. Alastair McEwen will be leading a retreat for the Casey CRC Session here at the College at the end of October. Henk de Waard will be in Western Australia from 24 November to 1 December, preaching and conducting a short course on 'The Gospel and World Religion'.

Ministry Spot...

(by Dr. Murray Capill)

In the last *RTC Monthly* I began to address the issue of the role of elders in the local church. Elders are called to be shepherds of the flock. We saw that one useful strategy in fulfilling that role is to divide the flock into "mini-flocks". Each elder cares for a mini-flock, relying not so much on an annual home visit, but seeking to establish regular informal contact with his people, integrate them into the network of church ministries and relationships, and making pastoral visits as required.

But is this the only model available? Are there alternative ways of shepherding the flock that are just as sound? And what does a church do if it can't find enough elders for the mini-flock model to work well?

It seems to me that if a church simply doesn't have enough men to have small, effective mini-flocks, there are two things it ought *not* to do. One is make the mini-flocks larger and larger so that the care becomes less and less meaningful and the elders more and more frustrated in their work. The other thing churches must not do is lower the bar of eldership, appointing out of desperation rather than principle. Only those well-suited for office should be ordained.

A number of churches are therefore developing other strategies for shepherding the flock. One model is to make home groups (or growth groups, small groups, cell groups or whatever you want to call them) the main providers of primary pastoral care. In the home group people find a place of prayer, support, encouragement and Bible input. The home group leaders are key people, following up the people in their groups and mobilising them to care for each other, and other people with needs.

In this model each elder may be responsible for the oversight of two, three or four home groups. They themselves may or may not lead a group, but they do mentor the leaders of the home groups. Each elder encourages his home group leaders in their work and stays in touch with them regularly so as to know pastoral needs. They are then able to follow up where there is a pastoral crisis or special need, but they do not personally try to extend regular care to all those in the home groups. The elders oversee pastoral care via the home groups rather than trying to do all the pastoral care themselves. This frees them up to focus on other aspects of the eldership – overseeing church vision and direction, encouraging and resourcing ministries, training and equipping people for works of service.

In this model, fewer elders are needed but more well-trained and supported home group leaders are required, making a strong second tier of leaders in the church. In time, some of these home group leaders will step up to eldership, with a good background in small group leadership and pastoral care.

Another model, similar to this and complementary to it, is to establish a pastoral care team. Here a team of church members with a pastoral heart are given significant responsibility for visiting, encouraging and caring for people in the congregation. Such a team will usually involve women as well as men and people of varying ages, so that care can be extended appropriately to a range of people in the congregation. The elders mentor and interact closely with this team, staying in touch with pastoral needs, giving advice, and getting involved in some but by no means all situations. Typically the pastor/s and elders will always be involved in membership issues, disciplinary situations and crisis pastoral care.

Some may ask, Is delegating primary pastoral care to others a biblical way of the elders shepherding the flock? The answer to that is that the Bible never lays out a single model of *how* the flock is to be shepherded. The elders are responsible to ensure that everyone in the church is being spiritually fed, encouraged, protected, challenged and nurtured to maturity in Christ. For this to be done by utilising the gifts of many is fully in line with the biblical model of the members of the body being equipped for works of service, and every member of the body ministering to others. What is essential, however, is that the elders are responsible for, involved in and vitally in touch with the pastoral care being provided.

As mentioned above, these models not only require fewer elders but also allow more time for the elders to develop other aspects of their leadership task. We will turn to this next time.