

RTC Monthly

NO. 25 12 May 2008

College News

- It's getting toward the business end of the semester for students. There are four lecture weeks left, during which many assignments are due, followed by reading and the two week exam period.
- The RTC Board meets later this month and will continue to work on strategic planning for the next five years. Considerable progress has already been made in thinking through future staff appointments, course delivery, training approaches and College ethos. We value the prayers of our supporters as we try to think clearly about what theological education should look like in these early years of the 21st century.

Faculty News

- This past weekend Bill Berends has been in South Australia for preaching and speaking engagements in the Christian Reformed Churches there.
- Henk de Waard is preparing for a three week trip to Indonesia in June where he will be engaged in a number of speaking and preaching engagements.
- June will also see Murray and Steve on separate trips to NSW. On 8 June Murray will be preaching in Wollongong and then Sutherland, where he will preach at the ordination of recent RTC graduate, Simon Vanderwel. Steve Voorwinde will be leading the Classis Challenge in Sydney on 21 June. This is a great event for people who are thinking about ministry possibilities for the future. It's also a chance to sharpen Bible study skills and think about how to preach on a Bible passage. For details more details people in NSW should contact Rev. Leo Douma.

Book Corner...

(A recommendation from Murray Capill....)

Over recent years Mark Driscoll has made a large impression on the emerging church scene in the USA. The church he planted in Seattle has grown massively over the last ten years and his book **Confessions of a Reformation Rev. - Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church** (Zondervan, 2006) tells something of the story. But this book tells more than the story of a growing church. It gives much of the thinking and mindset behind it. Consequently it is a book that makes you

think, shakes you, disturbs you, annoys you, excites you, motivates you. At least that is how I found it.

Driscoll has quite an edge to him and is very hard to box. He preaches hour long expository messages in which a Reformed soteriology shines through. He uses language and humour that is very earthly and is sometimes designed to shock. He has a more Pentecostal view of the Spirit, speaking, for example, of prophetic dreams that have guided him in his ministry. His taste in music is for rock that connects with the people he reaches in downtown Seattle. He has a disarming humility, as he exposes his own foibles and failings. Most prominently, however, he has enormous passion for the work of the gospel and the need for the church to be relevant to the culture without compromising the message.

It's a great read – stimulating whether you agree with it or not (and sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't!). He deals with important questions. The first chapter on ten key questions churches must ask would be fascinating for any eldership team to tackle. It would certainly generate discussion! Other chapters have very "Driscollian" titles, like, "Jesus, Our Offering was \$137 and I want to use it to buy bullets", and "Jesus, Why am I getting fatter and meaner?" So it's popular in style, but significant in content. Definitely worth a read followed by a coffee and debate with someone else who's read it.

Ministry Spot...

(by Dr. Murray Capill)

Last time I said that pastoral care is not just about making pastoral visits, it is about creating a certain kind of community – a community of truth, grace and integrity. Such a community is counter-cultural in our post-modern context of broken relationships, individualism and damaged lives. It is the unique fruit of the gospel.

Within such a community pastoral care must be diversified. The traditional concept of pastoral care being chiefly the work of one man - *the pastor* - so that only a visit from him really counts and every major pastoral concern is dealt with by him, is quite untenable in our present context. To quote Paul Goodliff,

"It is unlikely that a superhuman pastor exists who is expert and accomplished at every aspect of pastoral care, and even more unlikely that they will be able to exist on an hour's sleep a day and thus give 23 hours a day to meeting the pastoral needs in the community. It is, however, all too common to discover pastors who think that is what they are called to be and do. Pastoral care located in the sole pastor, the lone ranger of the pastoral care world, is doomed to inadequacy and frustration." (Goodliff, *Care in a Confused Climate: Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture*, Darton: Longman and Todd, 1998, p. 228).

It might be added that it is not only pastors who often think they are called to this. Congregations often think their pastor is called to this too and consequently they place unrealistic expectations on him and set themselves up for disappointment.

Of course pastors must pastor! They are shepherds of the flock. They will often need to visit the sick, comfort the grieving, help a young couple prepare for marriage, spend time with widows, counsel the troubled. But they cannot and need not do all the pastoral care. They cannot because, as we have observed, post-modern society is producing endless relational and moral chaos in people's lives. If a church is growing and reaching out to the lost, a pastor will not possibly be able to meet all the needs. More than that, he need not meet all the needs because to do so is unbiblical!

The Bible shows us that effective pastoral care in the local church is diversified and is not the domain of one man.

Firstly, pastoral care is diversified when all the elders are viewed as pastors. All elders are called to be shepherds of the flock (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4). It is not only "the minister" who is a pastor, but each elder as well (I hope to consider next time how the elders may be effective shepherds of the flock).

Secondly, pastoral care is diversified when "one anothering" is taken seriously. There are some 46 "one another" statements in the New Testament, including the injunctions to carry one another's burdens, love one another, teach and admonish one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, build one another up, and be patient with one another. These are all pastoral callings. Within the church we are to care for one another. A key part of an effective pastoral care ministry in the church is to ensure that such one anothering happens.

For most churches today, the best way to ensure that is to build up a home group (or small group or cell group) ministry. While it is hard for any of us to care for everyone else in the church, it is quite manageable to keep a special eye out for about ten

other people with whom we meet regularly for Bible study, prayer and fellowship.

Thirdly, pastoral care is diversified as we engage the pastoral gifts of people within the church. Romans 12 speaks of those who have gifts of encouraging and gifts of showing mercy. Other people may have counselling gifts. Some have distinct gifts in caring for children or young people or new believers. In our cultural context it is particularly important to find ways of encouraging women to minister to women (Titus 2:3-5) because it is increasingly difficult for male elders to pastor women appropriately.

In a church where many people are active in using their gifts and where a range of ministries have been developed, pastoral care will be taking place in many different settings. The pastor and elders must exercise pastoral oversight of all this ministry, but they do not have to meet every need and make every visit.

Finally, pastoral care will be diversified when we understand that it is about more than visiting the sick and needy. And it is certainly about more than doing a round of visits to make people feel loved! The biblical intent of pastoral ministry is to build people up in the Lord so that they use their gifts to serve the Lord wherever he has placed them (Eph 4:11-13). Pastoral care is not about pandering to people's desires to receive individual attention from a church leader. It is about stimulating spiritual growth in people's lives. It is about shepherding them to maturity in the faith, in the ordinary stretches or life as well as in times of crisis. It is about discipling them to effective servanthood and ministry. It is about "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col 1:28). Pastoral care, therefore, takes place when preaching takes place, when ministry training takes place, when discipleship takes place.

When people are pastorally nurtured in this variety of ways, and when they understand this to be biblical pastoral care, they will feel less need to have *the* pastor visit them. More than that, they will sense more keenly that the Lord is their Pastor (Psalm 23:1), shepherding them through the ministry of the Word, the oversight of the elders, the love and fellowship of the church community and the many ministries of the church. They will realize that pastoral care is best not when they are passive recipients of care, but active participants in a pastorally caring and spiritually growing community.