

RTC Monthly



No. 27 – 29 July 2008

College News

- The second semester is now well underway. We were pleased to welcome two new day students from the Geelong region.
- A distance ed course in Church History is being offered this semester. It is not too late to sign up for the course. If you are interested please contact the RTC office. Normally Bill Berends would also offer a theology course by distance but he is on Long Service Leave for the rest of this year. Bill and his wife Henny are travelling around Australia and are currently basking in the sun somewhere in north Queensland.
- A five week pastoral care training course, taught by Murray Capill, is currently being offered at the Moolap Baptist church. This is a new venture in which the College is trying to work more closely with local churches to assist them in basic bible and ministry training. We are encouraged by this first opportunity to work in conjunction with a local church and were pleased to see over 30 people there the first evening from several churches on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Faculty News

- The weeks between the two semesters saw the RTC faculty travelling to various places for ministry opportunities. Henk DeWaard's time in Indonesia went well despite the heat and a demanding schedule. Alastair McEwen spoke for a day at the *Target 21* program hosted in Adelaide, while Murray Capill spoke at the *NSW Thing* in Sydney. Steve Voorwinde led the Classis Challenge in Sydney and also had a Sunday preaching there. He also spoke on Revelation at the Geelong Bible Conference in July.
- An address Steve gave last year at the annual Edersheim lecture in Melbourne, entitled, "How Jewish is *Israel* in the New Testament?" has been published in three different formats: as a two-part article in *Trowel & Sword*; in the online International Jewish Evangelical Fellowship magazine *Chavurah*; and in the forthcoming issue of the scholarly journal, *Reformed Theological Review*.

Book Corner...

(A recommendation from Murray Capill....)

Mark Dever's, **What is a Healthy Church?** (Crossway Books:2007) is a short, easy-to-read version of his earlier work, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Dever is now famous for these nine marks which provide a helpful guide to thinking about the health of your church. Dever has a strong commitment to the Word of God, he encourages serious commitment to the local church and he writes from a Reformed Baptist perspective.

So what are the nine marks? Well if I gave and described them all you might not read the book! So suffice to say the first three marks are what he calls *essential marks*, the first of which is expositional preaching. The latter six are *important marks* and include a biblical understanding of evangelism, biblical church discipline, and biblical church leadership. His marks are either well founded biblically or make good biblical sense. Biblical is the key word. He's not trying to be trendy or novel and he is no pragmatist. This is useful, sane stuff for our people to read.

Ministry Spot...

(by Dr. Murray Capill)

In the previous two articles on Pastoral Care I have argued for Pastoral Care being about the creation of a certain kind of community, not just the conducting of a certain number of visits. I have also argued that the creation of such a community requires the diversification of pastoral care. It cannot solely be the domain of the pastor but must be the work of many in the church.

In this final article I want to focus particularly on the work of the elders. Elders are shepherds. Biblically speaking they are just as much the pastors of the church as the minister. In the New Testament the three terms *pastor*, *elder* and *overseer* (or bishop) are used interchangeably.

So what is the pastoral role of the elder? How are they to carry out the mandate to “shepherd the flock” under their care? (Acts 20:28). In answering this, it is important to note that no single system or method is laid out in Scripture. Principles are given but structures are not. So we should be careful to leave freedom for a variety of approaches for churches of different sizes, people with different needs and elders with different gifts.

With this in mind, and using shepherding language, I suggest five broad activities for the shepherds of the flock - the elders of the church.

First, the shepherds must exercise oversight of the direction of the flock as a whole. They are to lead and guide the flock. They need to know where it should be going and take responsibility to get it there. Elders must exercise clear directional leadership in the life of the church. In particular, that means they must be active in shaping a counter-cultural gospel community that is like a city on a hill in our relationally messy world.

Second, the shepherds must ensure the provision of good pasture for the flock. It is the elders’ responsibility to ensure that the sheep are fed spiritually and focused on the Good Shepherd. That means they must ensure that there is good biblical teaching and preaching, and effective discipling and training so that the saints are equipped for works of service (Eph 4:11-12). Even though they won’t do all the teaching, preaching, training and discipling themselves, they are responsible for it.

Third, the shepherds must take responsibility for admitting new sheep and removing any goats that don’t belong. In traditional language, the elders must exercise church discipline. They should readily embrace new-born lambs; they should discourage sheep from roaming from flock to flock; they should challenge stropy sheep that damage the pasture for others (see Ezekiel 34:17-22); and they should warn the flock against wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Fourth, the shepherds must ensure the provision of individualised care for all members of the flock. They must ensure that there are systems or structures in place so that people are ready and able to care for the needy, bind up the wounded, rescue the straying, encourage the strong. Many churches will use home groups, pastoral care teams, diaconal ministry, counselling services, prayer ministries and so on, to ensure that each member of the flock experiences personal care. The elders must actively oversee and resource this care.

Fifth, the shepherds should be in touch with the sheep. There is a danger that they undertake the first four roles as remote farm managers not loving shepherds. That is never the nature of faithful biblical shepherding. They must rub shoulders with many different sheep. They must not only oversee pastoral care but get their own hands dirty as well. They will spend time with individuals, make pastoral visits, open their homes to others and show regard for the least of the brethren. In this way they will not only get to know the needs of the flock but also reflect the love of the Good Shepherd.

The Bible regards it as a high and noble calling to be an elder – a shepherd of the flock of God. It is a role that comes with much responsibility but also great reward. Peter says to his fellow elders, “When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

Reformed Theological College
125 Pigdons Rd, Waurin Ponds, 3216
Ph. 5244 2955, email: admin@rtc.vic.edu.au

Please forward this email newsletter to others who may be interested in it.
If you want to be added to or removed from the mailing list,
please send a brief note to admin@rtc.vic.edu.au