

The Way

Somewhere in the USA a bus driver finished his shift and headed back to the terminal. Somehow he took a wrong turn. He didn't arrive back at the terminal at the scheduled time of 7:29pm, and a short while later his supervisors started looking for him. Meanwhile the driver's wife called the terminal and told them that he might be disoriented as a result of medication he was taking.

For 6 hours the massive bus and its driver could not be found. Finally the police located him 320km north of where he was supposed to be. The bus was motoring slowly down a rural back road, weaving slightly from side to side. The police pulled the bus over and the driver acknowledged he was lost.

A police news release said later, "The driver had no idea where he was and agreed he had made a wrong turn somewhere. Apparently this had not occurred to him during the 6 hours he drove without finding the bus depot."

It occurs to me that the driver was a very fortunate fellow. He didn't realize he was lost, but he had others who did know, and who cared enough about him to want to look for him. He was found and was redirected by those who knew the way.

It's Christmas (again). It's traditionally a time of reflection. It's a time to consider a gift. Perhaps that's better written as: it's a time to consider *the* Gift, that most precious of gifts given to mankind by God Himself – the gift of His Son. Given for those who were lost. You.

December is a time when the world stops in order to go shopping. December is a time when the church stops in order to consider once again Christ's birth and sacrifice.

And as I, too, reflect, it occurs to me that I am a very fortunate fellow. In my natural state I wouldn't realize I'm lost, but I have Another who did know, and Who cares enough about me to want to look for me. I was found and I am redirected by Him who *IS* the Way.

And knowing that is all it takes for me to have a very cheerful Christmas.

I wish you all a thanks-filled Christmas and blessed New Year.

Eric Dekker

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The Changing of the Guard

Ever seen photos of the changing of the guard? It's a rather pompous affair, and today is largely symbolic. Basically, guards are changed to ensure that there is ongoing vigilance and (perhaps) enthusiasm for the role that must be played. (I haven't actually ever seen a guard that looked enthusiastic...they usually look like they're sleeping with their eyes open.)

Contender has seen its fair share of changes over the past year. On the one hand, this is a good thing. Editors remain enthusiastic and committed. On the other hand, it does cause disruption.

Still, at this the end of another year of publishing, we can thank God for all He has provided. We've had sufficient material to fill another 8 issues, we've had articles dealing with a variety of topics, we've had interaction. Thank you to all those of you who read and contribute!! You'll hopefully be glad to hear that we hope to begin our next series of issues in February.

A few changes are happening again, in preparation for next year. The EIC is being replaced, and so whilst the name Eric will remain, Dekker will be replaced by Terpstra. We wish you strength and ability in filling this role Eric.

We also farewell Arend who is preparing for an exciting venture in other lands. Thank you too for your regular contributions. Don't be too scared to continue to submit material in the future (though

as a theological student you'll probably find it difficult to keep the length of your papers down...!)

We welcome Ben Schoof (ex-Kelmscott, newly Mt Nasura) to the fold. We are grateful for your willingness to step up to the editorial podium, and hope you'll soon find your place as a writer and editor.

These changes mean that the editorial board will stand as follows:

EIC	Eric Terpstra
Layout	Rosanne Numan
Editors	Colette Groenewold
	Adrian Hordyk
	Hugo Hordyk
	Ben Schoof
	Rose Vermeulen

We also say a fond and emotional farewell to our banner. The front cover design of Contender is due for replacement, and so we ask (beg!) those of you who are into Art and/or design to please submit an idea which we would then be able to consider using as the cover design for the next number of issues. Please, don't be shy. We'll need it by January 13th, 2006, to allow us time to get it printed. If you intend to work on a design, please let us know so that we have some idea of the number of submissions to expect.

E Dekker

I can jump puddles

(Meditating on Psalm 18)

All of us could tell a story of misery, of suffering, of having to fight against sin. We face parental pressure, disappointments, and a sense of failure, poor health, broken hearts and sorrow. Add war, racism, poverty, earthquakes, tsunamis and the like and we have a cocktail for a miserable life. So where is God in all of this?

How long do we have to wait for Him to come? How can we wrestle the turmoil in our own lives to accept the will of God and the providence of the Almighty? How can we fight against the sense of impending doom that seems to come over us everyday? How do we live without being chronically depressed - day in, day out?

The real battle in today's world is not just pain and misery - it's the battle against the principles of darkness! Sin causes pain instead of happiness. We give up instead of fight and we envy the people who seem to have it all and don't seem to have to fight the battles we do. We wonder how we are going to get through - we become depressed and can't think about tomorrow because we can't even get through today! Between selfishness and weakness so often we are brought to the edge and think, "I can't do this!! It's too hard!!"

It's easy to say, "I can't face it anymore", and sometimes we pray for a way out, for death to take us. Life seems too hard and we don't have the faith of Job and we feel like failures. We can't fight like David and we just want to experience peace. Maybe you think "David was a warrior- there's no way I can fight like him and be a man after God's own heart". But David was

"With my God I can bend the strongest bow and scale the highest wall"

"With my God I can do anything"

(Ps 18)

not a warrior in his own strength!! He knew what it was like to give up - and feel weak! He confesses himself that he is helpless!! Nevertheless, in his distress, in the suffering and the persecution David experienced in his life, David turned to God. He recognized that he was weak - that he was helpless and that God was the only one who could give him the strength to keep fighting. However, here is something to think about - when you are helpless, when you feel like giving up, God is your strength! Ps 18 says "With my God I can bend the strongest bow and scale the highest wall". We might think we will drown in the puddle that is in front of us - but God says "*Hang on. You can jump over that wall!!*" God makes it possible for us to survive that broken heart, to overcome the temptations that lie on our path. God says "*I will always be with you*" even if it seems that no-

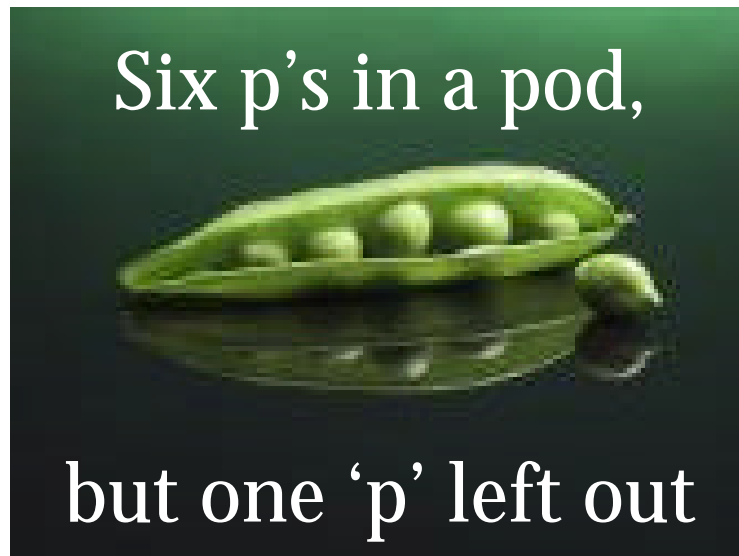
one cares about anything anymore and you just want to give up!

Why is that powerful God so concerned with YOU? Why does God give you the strength to jump over that insurmountable wall?? Because your troubles are God's troubles. When we hurt, God hurts with us - but ultimately, through our weakness, the glory of God is shown! When we say, "I can't" God says, "You can't, but I can...". When we sin, God shows His power in saving us, and when we fall, God's power picks us up. That puddle that seems so enormous in our strength is nothing in God's eyes. He can make us jump over walls and fight wars, when we can only drown in our own suffering and misery! King Jesus crushed the troop, scaled the wall and won the battle! It is in light of that victory that God gives us all the strength we need. We share in Christ by true faith ALONE!

In your life that puddle may seem like an ocean. The wall seems insurmountable. Maybe you say: "I can't face it". Maybe when you look at others you say, "I don't know how they do it". But think of it this way - you cannot do anything. But GOD CAN!

With YOUR God, you can jump over that wall, you can win that battle!! God does not promise a life without battles, but He does promise that whatever battle we face, no matter how big or small, He will pick us up and carry us in HIS arms. He will give us strength and He will win the battle for us. He gives His Word and His Spirit to equip us. Then you discover what David discovered in Psalm 18: "*With my God I can do anything*" and as Paul writes in Philippians "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*".

So, with my God I can jump that puddle. With my God, I can leap over that wall. With my God I can bend the strongest bow. With my God, I can do ALL things. How about you?



Some of the readers of *Contender* might know “our Mel” (Melissa Fokkema). For the sake of those who do not, Mel is a 17 year old member of the Free Reformed Church of Rockingham. Until recently, she was employed as a day-care worker. She was an ordinary girl, doing ordinary things ... until October 17, 2005 when she contracted Meningococcal Septicaemia and came very close to death. For days her life hung in the balance, humanly speaking.

Myriads of prayers were offered to God, pleading that He might graciously spare her life. In His goodness, God granted our petition, and Mel survived the disease. But this deadly disease left its mark on her. The disease destroyed the blood vessels in Mel's hands and feet, causing those members of her body to die. Both of her feet and both of her hands have been amputated.

As Mel's pastor, I was asked by the editor of *Contender* to write an article in which I bring God's Word to bear on what has happened to Mel. Over the past weeks, I have had the privilege of sharing Scripture with Mel with the hope of giving her comfort and peace, strength and hope. I'm happy to share with the youth at large some of the things that Mel and I have talked about. Some of the comforting truths of Scripture that I have shared with Mel begin with the letter “p”.

Thus the title “*Six p's in a Pod, but one 'p' left out.*”

The **PLAN** of God includes suffering

God has a master plan by which He governs the course of history. It is an all-comprehensive plan. It includes the very great things that happen in creation, as well as the tiny things that happen in each of our lives. Consider the stars. The prophet Isaiah says that God names the stars. He counts them. Each evening He brings out the stars, and not one of them is missing (cf. Isa 40:26). Compare this with John 10, and you will draw the conclusion that God watches over the stars in the heavenly constellations, just as a shepherd watches over his sheep. Yes, God governs the big things in creation.

But God also governs the most insignificant things in our lives—things that we don't even pay attention to—things that we don't even notice—things we're not even concerned about. Do you notice when you lose a hair? Do you pay any attention when this tiny part of your body falls to the ground? No, that is too insignificant, too unimportant to think or worry about. But it's not too trivial for our heavenly Father. He numbers even the hairs of our head, and not one falls to the ground without His will (cf. Matt 10:29-31). Surely, then, we cannot lose greater members of our

body, such as our hands and feet, without the will of our heavenly Father. Sure the loss of our limbs is a part of God's plan for our lives.

The **PROMISE** of God in suffering

The knowledge that God plans every aspect of our life is not very comforting in itself, especially when God's plan includes suffering. But what does comfort us is the promise of God in suffering. And this is God's promise: *"that all things work together for good to those who love God"* (Romans 8:28). Not just some things that God has planned for our life will work for our good. Not just *most* things. No, *all* things work together for the good of those who love God.

Most often attention is focused on the word 'good'. That means that all things we experience will be beneficial or useful for us. But I would draw your attention to the words 'work together'. All things work together for our good. In times of suffering, we often focus so much on our suffering, and we wonder how this one thing can work for good. But Paul has a far broader scope. He has in view all things, and he sees that *all* these things "work together" for good. It could happen in an orchestra that one instrument by itself emits a sound that is not so pleasing to the ear. But when all the instruments of the orchestra are playing, that 'not-so-pleasing' instrument blends in with all the other instruments to make a beautiful sound. It might be that in a recipe, a single ingredient might not be so pleasing to the palate. But when mixed with all the other ingredients, it contributes to make a delightful treat.

Life is very complex. It is made up of many parts. There is physical life, mental life, spiritual life. There is this present life, and there is eternal life. We can speak about our personal life, but our life is broader than just our own person. We speak of marriage life, family life, and church life. Suffering, as great and grievous as it may be, is only a part of our

life. In the symphony of our life, all things that God has planned will work *together* for good. That is God's trustworthy promise, a very comforting promise.

The **PRESENCE** of God in suffering

You know the story of Daniel's three friends who refused to bow to the image of Nebuchadnezzar. These three were thrown into the fiery furnace. How surprised Nebuchadnezzar was when he saw four men in the furnace. You know who that fourth man was. It was God. In that very difficult time in their life, these three pious young men experienced the wonderful comfort of *Immanuel, God with us*. What these three men experienced was just what God had promised through the prophet Isaiah many years before. *"When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior"* (Isaiah 43:2,3).

Sometimes God's plan for our lives includes suffering. Sometimes we have to walk through deep, dark valleys of the shadows of death. How comforting to know that we don't have to walk those difficult paths by ourselves. David experienced that and wrote about it in Psalm 23:4 *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me."*

The **POWER** of God in suffering

A heavy burden is bearable for a little while. But in time the weight taxes our muscles and they begin to ache, then quiver, and finally weaken, and we want to be rid of that burden. We are not so strong as we imagined. We humbly admit, *"I can't bear it any longer."*

Paul experienced something of that. He suffered from a 'thorn' in the flesh (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). And that thorn became a burden. He couldn't bear it any longer...or so he thought.

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Six p's in a pod, but one 'p' left out (*continued*)

So he prayed that God would remove that thorn' and relieve him of that burden. But God would not grant him what he asked. Instead, God provided Paul with something better. He provided Paul with the strength to deal with it. God said to Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (v.9).

Paul realized that God, for the sake of His glory, wanted him to bear that burden so that He could display His great power in Paul. In the end Paul learned to accept that burden, relying upon God's power to bear it. Paul later said, *"Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (v.9).

The **PEACE** of God despite suffering

The apostle Paul was well acquainted with suffering. In order to shame those who belittled him, he once engaged in a little 'foolish' boasting. He said, *"I was in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness"* (2 Cor 11:23-28).

While he was in prison, he wrote these words: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your*

hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7).

In these two verses Paul covers all three tenses of his life—the past, present and future. Effectively he says, *"Don't worry about tomorrow, but instead, pray. Let your mind ponder how wonderfully God has cared for you in the past. Then offer God the sacrifice of thanksgiving for all His blessings and care. And rather than worry about the future, bring your requests to God, knowing that the same God whom you just thanked for yesterday's care will show you that same care tomorrow. If you pray in this way rather than fret, you will receive in the present an indescribable peace. That peace will protect your heart and mind from thinking and feeling sinful thoughts and feelings such as fear, bitterness or resentment."* With this peace in his heart, the child of God will be like Christ who slept in the boat on the storm-tossed sea while all others on the boat were greatly alarmed and afraid.

The **PURIFICATION** by God through suffering

I was going to entitle this 'p' the purpose of God through suffering. But then I realised that I could not say with certainty what purpose God has for suffering, for God undoubtedly has different reasons and perhaps multiple reasons for the suffering that He sends His children in this life. But one purpose stands out among all others which will be true for everyone who suffers. By means of suffering God purifies His children.

We are all familiar with Job. Job didn't know why God had brought such intense suffering and affliction upon him. But this he said with certainty: *"When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold"* (Job 23:10).

Job was already gold before he was afflicted with much sorrow and pain. That is, Job was *“blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil”* (Job 1:1). Job was a child of God who was justified by his Redeemer and sanctified through the Spirit. As one of the redeemed, he was precious in the eyes of God. He believed in God, loved God, trusted God and lived in obedience to God. Yes, Job was gold before his sufferings began. But he wasn't perfect. He was like gold taken from the earth. Mixed with his glorious new nature were still some of the impurities of the old.

Silver or gold dug from the earth is purified in the furnace. When the silver and gold melt in the intense heat, the impurities in them rise to the top of the caldron, for these impurities are lighter than the precious metal. The refiners skim these impurities off the top of the molten metal, leaving behind pure gold or silver.

In like manner, the saints are purified when they go through the furnace of suffering and affliction. Though they believe in God, unbelief is mixed with their faith. Though they love God, remnants of their old hatred still cling to them. Though they obey God, they are still defiled with a measure of disobedience. But when the saints go through the furnace of affliction, some of the dross is removed, and their faith, their love, their trust and obedience is just that much purer than before.

That makes six 'p's. As in the picture above, there is one 'p' is left out of the pod, namely...

The **PUNISHMENT** of God in suffering

Don't misunderstand me. There are times when this 'p' is the biggest pea in the pod. That is, there are times when God inflicts suffering upon His people chiefly because they harden their hearts in deliberate disobedience to God and refuse to repent.

(Just check out a text such as Leviticus 26:18,24).

But no one should suppose that when the godly suffer God is punishing them for their sins. That's the mistake that Job's friends made. They assumed that God was punishing Job because of some serious sin. They thought that affliction was always a display of God's wrath and displeasure. But these three miserable comforters were wrong, and they were severely chastised by God for accusing Job of sin.

The disciples of Christ thought the same as Job's three friends. When they came across a man born blind, they asked Jesus, *“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* (cf. John 9:1-2). But Jesus said, *“Neither!”* His blindness was not a punishment for sin. He was born blind in order that Christ might display His power and glory by restoring his sight.

It is natural for the saints to examine themselves when they suffer. Suffering often induces introspection. But the godly ought not to torment their soul with the thought that God is punishing them for their sins. The guilt as well as the punishment for the sin which they commit has been placed on the shoulders of Christ Jesus their Saviour. He has borne their guilt and their punishment. God looks upon His faithful children in Christ, and regards them as though they have done nothing wrong and everything right. Whatever purpose God may have for their affliction, it is not to punish them for their sins. The godly must not aggravate their suffering by such a thought, lest they increase the burden of their affliction and make themselves miserable. Rather, the godly should be assured of God's love and favour in Christ, which will make their burden lighter.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

Br. Arend Witten treated us to an enlightening article in your November issue under the heading 'Calvin the Critic'. Allow me to comment briefly on one of the matters raised.

The 'Scottish rebels' to which AW refers most likely happened to be our Reformed brethren whose famous struggle for the independence of the Church was abundantly blessed by God. Many reliable sources testify to the crucial importance of this conflict with the tyrant King Charles I. Charles was an absolute monarch who firmly believed in the Divine Right of Kings, and who usually acted at the behest of Archbishop Laud of Canterbury. The episcopal system he wished to impose on the Church of Scotland in 1637 would have made him Head of the Church.

The Scots immediately decided to resist this Romish/Anglican threat. "The conscience of the people had been touched. Their God-given liberties were being infringed. Their Church was being made a mere department of State. The laws of Christ's Kingdom were being overwritten by the civil authorities. Setting aside the Word of God and the rights of a Christian people, the State had set up its own form of ecclesiastical government in which the king was supreme" (Collins). In March 1638, many thousands of Scots flocked to sign the National Covenant in defence: of the freedom to worship God according to His Word. Aably organised by Alexander Henderson, it became the authentic voice of Reformed Scotland. Indeed, "it embodied the unalterable resolve of a whole people to perish rather than submit to Popery" (Churchill).

When 30,000 soldiers under Leslie went to meet King Charles across the border, the gold lettering

on the Scottish banners read 'For Christ's Crown and Covenant'. The King was forced to swallow his royal pride, and agreed to convene a free Assembly (the Church) and a free Parliament (the State).

Careful study of Reformed sources - which really should include Samuel Rutherford's monumental 'Lex Rex', the cornerstone of the constitutional monarchy as we know it - will show that in effect there was very little between Knox's and Calvin's thought on civil authority. And I wonder - if the struggle by the Covenanters for a free Church is dubbed 'a rebellion by Protestants' - what sundry learned historians would call 'the reluctant rebellion' by the Dutch Calvinists against their King in 'the Eighty-Years' War. Just another bunch of misguided Protestants, perhaps?

Let us praise the Lord Who kept His churches under the government of Christ when secular interference led to the persecution of faithful believers, in Scotland and in The Netherlands.

Finally, may I suggest some reliable and accessible sources covering this tense period in the history of the Church?

- G.N.M. Collins, The Heritage of our Fathers (Edinburgh 1976)
 - A.M. Renwick, The Story of the Church (London 1963)
 - S.M. Houghton, Sketches from Church History (Edinburgh 1980)
 - Marcus L. Loane, Makers of Religious Freedom (London 1960)
- and for those who read Dutch:
- Gn. Werner, De Schotse kerkgeschiedenis (Barneveld 1991)

J VanderRos

On the Other Hand...

When Christ returns He'll come to judge the living and the dead (Apostles Creed).
Haven't the dead already been judged? Do they get judged a second time perhaps?

Send thoughts to Eric Terpstra at rose.vermeulen@frsa.asn.au

On a Mission: Tangan & Kaki Bagi Sesamamu

Being a Hand & Foot to each other

Here we are, sitting in the back of a jam-packed truck. All around us we see black hair, black faces; the white teeth stand out in sharp contrast against the dark skin. First we thought they all looked the same but now after a week we can easily spot the familiar faces of the dear friends that we have made. Here we are, all together on our way to So'e. They are just as excited as we are because for us and for most of them it is the first time to travel to and see Gunung Mutis (Mutis Mountain). We traveled with two cars and a truck and the truck alone had about 46 people packed in it. This sure was an eye opener for most of us.

So guess where we are ... we're in West Timor. It's a beautiful island of Indonesia just above Australia.

While travelling on the truck we have conversations with the people. They are very willing to try their English on us and are ever so willing to learn more and more English words and phrases from us. Others are playing a game of chess ... trying to keep their chess board straight while we go through some of the many holes in the road. Still others are playing the guitar and many join in singing. Whenever one person starts singing all others join in.

We can learn so much from these dear people: the love they show towards each other; the way they look out for each other; the family orientation they have; the way they show so much patience when a truck tyre pops for the third time. What a privilege it was for us to come to West Timor (on Friday 23rd of September) and experience their kindness and humbleness in so many ways. They allowed us to be part of their culture for two weeks. We, with such a different culture, were given the best they had. The only seat or bed in the

house, always served first at meal times and the constant smiles they gave us. There was never a time that we were on our own. Someone was always looking out for us.

And what a privilege it was to experience this with the knowledge that we all belong to our one Heavenly Father. For us it was a great witness to see God's work in places like West Timor. Even though we might think they are poor and not as well off as us, we could clearly see that in some way they have more to give than what we do back home. They share their faith so openly with other people. They go out of their way to help others. And the most important is that they want everyone to hear about Jesus Christ. They are not afraid to stand up for their faith. All this reminds me of the Fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. It was great to see this so clearly evident in West Timor.

Our theme for the trip was "Being a Hand and Foot to Each Other" – this was clearly presented on the front of the truck by the Timorese people! (The trip to the mountains was one of the many eye opening experiences that we had. I won't be able to mention all of them but do feel free to ask anyone who went for their stories and photos ☺). We went to Timor to help with the orphanage. This was a great experience and opened our eyes in so many ways. The building is different, the concrete making is different, the tiling is different, the scaffolding is different ... so many new things for us to learn. Often we would need the help of our Timorese friends and although we couldn't understand each other all the time by using our hands and feet we could make lots of things very clear. This often resulted in lots of fun and laughter!

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Tangan & kaki Bagi Sesamamu (*continued*)

At night we would help at their new church building. The walls were up and only the floors still needed to be done. The ground had to be loosened and the concrete made by hand and divided over the floor. The whole congregation would come together and help build their church. The children, youth, parents and older people and the Aussies would all be working together, sweating away and getting covered in cement and dust. What an awesome experience! The nice fresh watermelon gave us

often a nice refreshing break and renewed energy to shovel some more concrete!

Thanks be to God for giving us such an awesome experience in which we were allowed to see more of His children in such a different situation than we live in. May we learn lots from their kindness and humbleness.

Tineke van der Jagt

I'd like to say thanks to so many interested people in regards to the trip to Timor and for the support of all the churches. There have been so many people keen to lend a hand to those of the same faith yet struggling with the basics of life. It would only make sense to continue the trips with God's blessings. Next year around the same time (September) we hope to plan another trip with a small group. Details are still to be sorted, but we will keep you posted.

Thanks, Lisa Deman.

COCKATOO CARE

(AND CARE OF OTHER CREATED THINGS)

**What a wond'rous time is spring
When all the trees are budding.
The birds begin to sing.
The flowers start their blooming.
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it.
You want to sing, it's fresh like spring.
You want to pass it on.**

(A verse from the song 'Pass it on' by K. Kaiser)

Green grasses flow over the hillsides. Red blossoms adorn the gum trees. A myriad of colours brighten the gardens. Bees hum busily. Birds sing in joyful chorus. Butterflies fly lightly from flower to flower.

"The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" Genesis 2: 8&9.

The Lord is good. His creation is wonderful. Not only does He feed us abundantly with good food, but He plants trees to give pleasure to our eyes.

I care for God's creation for a living (well, at this stage almost for a living). But I am not a gardener, nor a florist. I am not a farmer's wife. I do not care for sick or injured animals as a veterinary or wildlife carer. I am not a zookeeper, nor do I buy and sell pets or plants.

And I do not teach environmental studies. These occupations do exist and it's not hard to see that these are valuable to society and can provide a good income.

Currently I am a Cockatoo nest box installer and a Cockatoo conservation community educator. I work (casual) with Landcare in Serpentine-Jarrahdale as a Black Cockatoo Project Assistant. Together with my manager I organise nest box (Cocka-tube) construction and installation (based on current available knowledge and research) to improve the breeding of our beautiful, native and threatened Black Cockatoos. Furthermore, we talk to people about the Cockatoos and project and welcome their support (you may help by simply recording your cockatoo sightings and sending them to the Water Corporation. For more information contact me at work on 9526 0652).

Why? You may not be aware that the Black Cockatoos are threatened. Black Cockatoos are locally common in some areas and love to fly and congregate in large flocks. But this is deceiving as on a larger scale, the species are decreasing in numbers. The project I work on is designed to decrease the threats to the Black Cockatoos.

Extensive land clearing since European Settlement has significantly reduced the habitat of Black Cockatoos, including the number of mature trees with breeding hollows (it takes over 250 years for large hollows to form!). Of the limited natural hollows, there is competition with feral bees and birds such as the Galahs and Corellas. To prevent further decline and reduce the risk of extinction of the Black Cockatoos we must address the threats.

There are funds available to support projects like these (usually limited and short-term). If I had not pursued my dream to be involved in bird conservation and had instead listened to those who discouraged me in what seemed an unrealistic pursuit, then I would not have discovered employment in this developing industry. God has guided me here and I am blessed to be able to serve Him through Cockatoo Care. (Although I am taking this opportunity to promote my project and work, realise well that glorifying God in what we do is our work. Therefore, I can not write about the

environment without sharing how I work in the industry).

The beauty of being a Christian means we may see the environment through the eyes of God's Word. The Lord 'sends the springs into the valleys; they flow among the hills... by them the birds of the heavens have their home; they sing among the branches' (Psalm 104:10, 12). There is beauty and joy in creation, yet the earth is still under the curse of Genesis 3 and we see creation groaning with us as we await Christ's return (Romans 8:22). God calls us to serve Him by caring for His creation in the place we are and in the places He is leading us to on our daily walk of life.

Increased environmental awareness and funding for landcare and natural resource management (the latter phrase is gradually replacing the traditional 'landcare', due to major efforts to extend small landcare projects to landscape design) has created more opportunities for people to be actively involved in caring for the environment. Every one of you can, and are called to, show you care. Involvement can be as little as saying no to plastic bags or separating recyclable and non-recyclable materials. Or you can join in with tree planting, weeding and/or bird watching. Or you can pursue employment in the industry as I am doing.

If you have an interest(s) in frogs or birds or beetles or weevils or Arum lilies or salinity or unsightly waterways due to rubbish or algae blooms... *observe* the beauty or problem. *Look* in field guides, *talk* to your neighbour, *contact* the local Landcare office or CALM and/or *join* an interest group. *Record* your Black Cockatoo sightings. *Grow* in knowledge of God's creation and *share* it with others.

Above all and in all, as we eagerly await Christ's return to restore His creation to its full glory, remember Your Creator and share with others the wonder of His creation and recreation. Where you are now and on the path God is leading you in this life, you can show you care for His trees, His birds, His Black Cockatoos and all of His creation.

Jacinta Pleiter

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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Article Deadline for Next Issue: 02/02/06

Next Issue Distributed: 26/02/06