

*Peace Through  
Justice*

*The Kingdom  
of Heaven has  
been given  
to you*

*The character  
of the church  
of Christ*



*The  
E. Dethan family  
in West Timor*

*Grassie, Ontario  
welcomes  
Rev. Carl Van Dam*



Cl. Stam

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# Peace Through Justice

*We promote peace wherever we actively encourage and support the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

To some people the Bible appears to be a book filled with violence. To give you just one example: God commanded that all the Canaanites be destroyed and the land of Canaan be given to the people of Israel (Josh 1: 1-5). This would be a prime example of what is today called *ethnic cleansing*. If ethnic cleansing was wrong in Kosovo, why would it be acceptable in Canaan? How can the Lord God allow this, much less command it?

Now we could reply that this is typically an Old Testament situation. Today, in the light of God's revelation in Christ, such things would not be allowed to happen anymore. But that answer would be insufficient, for the New Testament also teaches that God will again severely judge the unbelieving world (Acts 17: 31).

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*Should we all become pacifists, people who will never resort to any active resistance that may involve violence?*

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The question has been asked whether God is *violent*. Can we really serve a God who allows or commands massive destruction to take place in the world He has created? Is there not much in the Bible (especially in the Old Testament) that we today simply cannot anymore accept as being valid?

## **Pacifism**

There are many people who in the course of time have embraced the idea of pacifism. This is the notion that under no circumstances violence is allowed. We are always to turn the other cheek and rather let ourselves be slaughtered than offer the slightest resistance.

As an example, the *Anabaptist movement* is sometimes cited. Anabaptists are by and large opposed to any violence and will therefore not be involved in any form of warfare. Military duty is to be rejected. This feeling lives especially among the *Mennonites* or "old order" Amish people. They will under no circumstances take up arms to fight, not even in self-defence. Is this, perhaps, the biblical way of looking at the matter of violence? Should we all become *pacifists*, people who will never resort to any active resistance that may involve violence?

For the sake of historical clarity, we must understand where this Anabaptist pacifism came from. At first the Anabaptist movement was very violent, advocating revolution and rebellion. The Anabaptists went on a grand military offensive in Europe, seeking to bring about by violence the kingdom of heaven on earth. It did not work; the Anabaptist experiment failed when the city of Munster (Germany) was retaken by troops loyal to the established governments and the Romanist church. This violent Anabaptism did great damage to the cause of the Reformation.

The Anabaptists were persecuted and dispersed. The movement was in complete disarray until Menno Simons undertook the pacification and reorganization of the movement. From then on, pacifism became the key building block in Anabaptist theology. It was not based on a better understanding of Scripture but was a redirection of thought based on sad experience. It is important to know the exact background of a certain idea or policy for this helps you to evaluate it better and more deeply.

## **Justice**

From the Bible it becomes clear that the establishing of peace is always connected to the *exercising of justice*. There can be no peace, unless justice is served. Rather than see the Lord

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as a God of violence, we must see Him as He has revealed himself: a God of *justice*. The Lord is a righteous God and He always deals with people in the way of justice.

Justice means that the Lord always acts in accordance with his law and word. You can depend on this. We tend to break our word and bend the rules, and so act unjustly or promote unrighteousness. But the Lord always deals with us in accordance with his given law.

## Inside . . .

Terrorism and violence in general has become a fact of life in the global village. One wonders what the way to true and lasting peace is. Is it through pacifism or is it that an untenable dream? Rev. Cl. Stam wrestles with these issues in his editorial.

This editorial nicely leads us to the meditation by Rev. M.H. Van Luik who reflects on Canada Day, and that as a nation we enjoy incredible peace and security. But what is our true and lasting security? Is it not the kingdom of heaven?

In most communities there are many different and unconnected churches. Why is this? Does Jesus Christ cause such confusion and variety? Or is it the result of the stubbornness and rebellion of man's own heart? This is something that Rev. P.G. Feenstra speaks about in his article which deals with the character of the church of Christ.

Rev. W. L. Bredenhof makes some interesting and important observations about our young people getting involved with short-term mission trips. There are very positive benefits to these trips, but also some concerns.

In this issue we are informed of the ordination of Rev. Carl Van Dam and some of the events surrounding his arrival in the Church at Grassie. We also learn of the life and work of Rev. Ed Dethan and his family in the West Timor Mission. Clearly life in West Timor is quite different from the lifestyle of North America.

We have our regular column, *Children's Catechism* which deals this time with Lord's Day 13. We also have a rhymed version of Psalm 47 by William Helder. And finally, we have a letter to the editor.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Peace Through Justice — Cl. Stam .....	310
Treasures New and Old – The Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you — M.H. Van Luik .....	313
Living by the Doctrines of Scripture – The character of the church of Christ — P.G. Feenstra .....	314
Psalm 47 — William Helder .....	316
The Ordination, Inaugural Sermon and Welcome evening of Rev. Carl Van Dam — B. DeVries and T. Witten .....	317
Letter to the Editor .....	319
Reflections on a Trend in Missions (1) — W.L. Bredenhof .....	320
Children's Catechism — J. Wiskerke van Dooren .....	322
West Timor Mission on the Way — Keith Sikkema .....	323

If we forget that God is a God of justice, we will derail in our thinking. For then we will not be able to understand God's actions and reactions as these are revealed to us in Scripture. I do not say that we can ever understand God fully in this life, but when we have a balanced biblical view of God, we can better understand and accept his manner of working.

The fact that God is righteous and just also means that He deals determinedly with sin and unrepentant sinners. In Psalm 7: 11 we read, "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day." This Psalm ends with praise and thanks, "I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness." There's not much in this world we can depend on. But we can trust fully that God will and does execute justice. Let us, too, be grateful that God is indeed a God of justice. This offers great hope to all who are dealt with unjustly by their fellow men in this world.

## Peace

The biblical concept of justice is closely linked to another notion, namely that of *peace*. There can be no (lasting) peace in any situation if justice is not served. We see this especially when we look at God's work of salvation in Christ.

In order for peace to come between the Lord and us, justice had to be served. Sufficient atonement had to be made. This is exactly what the Lord God brought about in sending his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul teaches us that being justified by faith, "we have *peace with God* through Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).

Not only has Christ secured our peace with God, but He also has opened the way for peace among people. In Ephesians 2: 14-18, we read about this new reality of peace in Christ, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making *peace*, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."

From biblical teaching it is clear that peace comes through Jesus Christ who reconciled us to God by his death on the cross and by his Spirit also makes us into one people.

It is little wonder, then, that in the night when Jesus Christ was born the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on *earth peace* to men on whom his favour rests." (Luke 2:14). Christ is the long-awaited King, the Prince of peace, endowed with justice, who will rescue his people from oppression and violence and give them enduring peace (cf. Ps 72).

## Promoting peace

The way to promote peace is not the way of pacifism. It is the way of faith in Jesus Christ. We promote peace wherever we actively encourage and support the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like the Anabaptists of old, we seek to promote the kingdom of heaven. Unlike the Anabaptists of old, we seek to do it *only* by the means of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the Gospel.

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*Not only has Christ secured our peace with God, but He also has opened the way for peace among people.*

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God has given us everything in his Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore he also *asks* our total commitment. No sacrifice can be too great, as the example of Abraham and Isaac shows us. But God does not demand our blood; He gave the blood of his only-begotten Son.

We are being confronted more and more with violence in this world. Many religions only serve to foster hate among people. Terrorists are no longer far-away fanatics but strike close to home. Violence has come within the walls. There is no peace because there is no justice. One day God will judge.

Let us then promote real peace by serving the Lord Jesus Christ in humble and complete obedience, and showing his love wherever we can. "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does God require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God*" (Mic 6: 8). We have our work cut out for us.



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MATTHEW 13:52

# The Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you

*... for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*

*... where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Luke 12:32, 34

On Canada Day we celebrate the blessings we enjoy as a nation. In comparison to the turmoil, unrest and violence that plague so many nations today, we realize it is truly a blessing to live in a nation that is stable and in which the citizens enjoy personal security. Such stability and security has also led to a relatively rich and prosperous nation. We do not live in a perfect nation, yet we have so much to be thankful for.

On Canada Day the nation reflects on what makes us uniquely Canadian. We are a multicultural society in which people from many different cultures are able to live side by side in peace. Canadians pride themselves on being a caring society that provides social security and Medicare for all its citizens. It is indeed the government's task to provide for the security and well-being of its citizens, but as Christians, our hope does not rest on the governing authorities.

As people of God we have a different perspective. We understand that it is a blessing to call this nation home, yet much more important is our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. While we may enjoy our earthly home in this nation, our hope rests in a much greater and more glorious kingdom. The Lord Jesus told his disciples, "Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." He reminds his disciples that the treasures of earthly kingdoms will pass away, but that the heavenly treasure will remain

forever. Then He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Although the Lord has spoken about the kingdom of heaven as a great treasure, from a human perspective it is not always easy to grasp that it is such a treasure. For it is something that can only be seen by faith. The kingdom of heaven is not something that you can see with your eyes or taste with your mouth. In this way the treasures of the kingdom of heaven are different from the treasures of this world. To our human senses, the material things of this world seem so much more real. We can touch money with our hands; we are able to experience the things money can buy and we see the beautiful things others have. The things of this world seem so much more tangible and real than the kingdom of God.

Therefore the kingdom of God often seems to be a theoretical ideal that appears to be so unreal for it goes beyond our human senses. Therein lies the temptation to put our heart on earthly things. And yet for the faithful child of God there is no greater comfort than to hear the Lord Jesus say, "Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."

These words of Jesus Christ parallel the words of God to Israel at Mt. Sinai, where the Lord made a covenant with Israel. At that time the Lord God said to Israel, "I am the LORD your God, and you are my people." He established Israel as

his nation over whom He would rule. This undeserving and stubborn people receive a precious gift from God. He has chosen them out of all the nations of the earth to be his people, whom He would protect and care for under his gracious rule.

The promise made by God to the Old Testament church is renewed by Jesus Christ to his New Testament church. The Lord Jesus says to his church today, "Your Father in heaven has been pleased to give you the kingdom." You do not need to earn the kingdom, for the Father in his gracious good pleasure, has for the sake of his Son, given you the kingdom. God the Father says to us, "I am, for the sake of my Son, your God. I will rule your life with my Word and Spirit. I will be a King to you, and I promise that I will watch over you, I will protect you and care for you. For the sake of Christ, I will forgive you of all your sins, I will renew you by the power of my Spirit, and I will give you the life everlasting."

Therefore you need to ask yourself, what is the treasure on which you set your heart? Do you set your heart on the things of the world that will rust, decay and fade away over time or do you set your heart on the treasure that your Father has given you? Where is your heart? Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.

P.G. Feenstra

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# The character of the church of Christ

*Too often we judge the church by looking at the character traits of the individual members.*

## Why so little unity?

If you open the yellow pages of your phone book you will find a list of many different churches. Through ads in local newspapers, signs and other means these churches invite people to attend their worship services and programs. All maintain and defend a separate existence and at the same time claim to be a church of Jesus Christ. But why? The Bible teaches us that Christ is not divided! Are we not to maintain the unity of the church since we confess *one* holy catholic church?

Disunity among believers is not to be blamed on Christ but on the stubbornness and rebellion of our hearts. The works of the flesh divide and break down communion (Gal 5:19-21). Many times people speak very foolishly about the church, as if it is a human institution. Rather than humbly confessing our own sin and guilt, striving to maintain the unity Christ has established, we try to justify going our separate ways. Changing churches becomes as easy as changing our clothes. We allow sinful human pride to stand in the way of Christ's work and unity in the Spirit.

## Not our church but Christ's

From a biblical and confessional perspective the importance of the church may not be diminished. Believing in Christ also means confessing his church. Christ is not separate from his

people. He came to save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21). From the beginning to the end of the world Christ gathers, defends and preserves for Himself a people chosen to everlasting life. Too often we judge the church by looking at the character traits of the individual members. But the Bible shows us how the church is the work of God. The Lord, by his amazing grace, brings together people who are weak, sinful and filled with many shortcomings and He places them in his sheepfold.

## Biblical names for the church

Scripture uses many descriptive and symbolic names for the church. Scattered like precious pearls throughout Old and New Testament are many beautiful designations of the church. These titles reveal more fully the mystery of the relationship between Christ and his people. If we take the time to listen to what the Lord reveals in the names He gives his church our lives will be enriched greatly.

Some designations for the church are more familiar than others. The church is the bride of Christ. Paul refers to the people of God as saints (Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1) and as those called to be saints (Rom 1:7). Christ's church is the household of God (Eph 2:18; 1 Tim 3:15) and the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). The church is the flock of Christ (John 10:16) and the branches of the vine (John 15:5; cf. Psalm 80).

Romans 8:9 turns our attention to a less familiar designation for the church. The apostle Paul writes to the congregation at Rome, "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit. . . ." This profound statement is reflected in what we confess about the church in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession: "Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him."

## Glorious things said of Zion

In the Old Testament the church is referred to as Zion, the city of God. The word "Zion" has its roots in a term meaning "fortress" or "fortified tower." Zion was the place the Lord had chosen as his dwelling place, where his people could find refuge and strength. As their Redeemer, the Lord promised to provide his people with all that they need for body and soul from within the walls of Zion, from within his fortress. Speaking of Zion, the author of Psalm 87 exclaims, "Glorious things are spoken of you, O

city of God.” “Glorious things” are not spoken about Zion because of its outward beauty. The city did not have any natural beauty, especially when we consider the psalm was written shortly after the return of the exiles. The temple and city were in ruins. But the worst problem was the lack of faithfulness and righteousness found among the people. The children did not know how to speak the language of the covenant, men and women were marrying outside the covenant community, the Sabbath was being profaned, etc.

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*We do not exist as church because we are stricter and more conservative than others. The foundation of every congregation is God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

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Glorious things are spoken of the church because the beauty of the city of God is in its character. The church’s glory does not hinge on the people but on the Lord’s free and sovereign love. Through the ministry of reconciliation, help and deliverance come forth from Zion. The Lord selects Zion as the centre of his spiritual government. “Pure religion, true worship and the doctrine of godliness were to be recognized as the pillars of Zion. This is the place where the truth is to be preserved and the unity of the faith maintained” (John Calvin).

God’s electing love in Jesus Christ allows us to speak glorious things about the church. We do not exist as church because we are stricter and more conservative than others. The foundation of every congregation is God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Lord has set us apart for Himself and for his glory. He

shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Every time the church assembles this is recognized in the salutation and benediction: “Grace to you and peace.”

To our comfort the gates of hell will not prevail or overcome the gates of Zion. The church “will be preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man” (Article 27 Belgic Confession).

### **A priestly kingdom and holy nation**

To further highlight the character of the church, the Bible also calls the church a holy nation. When Israel came to Mt. Sinai God said to Israel, “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. . . .” (19:5). This was said when church and nation were one. When the church becomes ecumenical and is spread throughout the entire world it retains the title “holy nation.” Think of what Peter writes in his first letter. He says to congregations comprised of Jews and Gentiles, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). What the Old Testament said about the nation of Israel is applied to the church in the New Testament. When, for example, Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!” this is not a reference to a country with natural boundaries but to the church.

### **Temple of the Holy Spirit**

A powerful designation for the church is the name “temple.” This temple far surpasses the beauty and splendour of the temple that was built in the days of Solomon. The stones are most magnificent and precious. It is built upon

the foundation of prophets and apostles. Christ is the cornerstone. It consists of living stones built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). This holy temple is the dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:21,22). How awe-inspiring!

This is why the apostle Paul issues a stern warning against those who abuse the church or cause division in the temple through jealousy, quarrelling or party spirit. “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred and you are that temple” (1 Cor 3:17).

### **The assembly of God**

Another designation for the church is: the assembly of the people of God. Moses refers to the ten commandments as the words that “the Lord spoke to all your assembly” (Deut 5:22). Furthermore, the law of Moses gives certain legislation about those who are to enter the assembly of the people of God (Deut 23). Some passages combine congregation with assembly. After Israel sinned against the Lord on the way through the desert we are told, “Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there” (Num 14:5). Gathered before Him as his obedient and worshipping people, Israel forms God’s church.

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*One church is not a carbon copy of the other.*

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This name is applied to the church in the New Testament as well. It refers to the body of believers assembled in various geographical locations (Acts 5:11, Romans 16:4, 1 Cor 11:18, Gal 1:2, Eph 5:23, 1 Thess 1:1). In Matthew 16:18 Peter confesses the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of the living God. And in response Jesus says, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church (my assembly).” Article 27 of the Belgic

Confession states, "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of true Christian believers. . . ." The church is different from every other assembly because it has its origin, life and resources in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It belongs to God and is governed by Him.

Scripture demonstrates how each local church has its own character and its own needs. When the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, writes letters to the seven churches in Asia

minor He does not send them a form letter which could be used in all the churches. He writes seven letters – one letter for each church. Paul addresses his letters to different congregations, to the assembly at Rome, the assembly at Corinth, etc. Spread throughout the world there are many churches having their own address, their own office-bearers, their own difficulties and concerns, and their own sins with which they have to contend. One church is not a carbon copy of the other.

## Psalm 47

Melody: Geneva, 1551

1. Clap your hands and shout! Let your joy ring out!  
Peoples far and near, God Most High revere!  
Awesome King is He, great in majesty.  
Nations He brought low, humbling every foe.  
By His mighty hand, He gave us our land—  
Sign to Jacob of God's electing love.
2. God went up on high with a joyful cry,  
And the trumpet's sound echoed all around.  
Now with loud acclaim, magnify His name.  
Play the harp and sing, praise the LORD our King.  
He rules all the earth. Shout His glory forth!  
Let your praise abound. Let the music sound!
3. Glorious is God's reign, great is His domain.  
He rules all the lands, issues His commands.  
Kings and princes all gather at His call;  
They with gladness join those of Abr'ham's line,  
For God from His throne claims them as His own.  
Let Him be adored as our sovereign Lord!

William Helder, 2003

## Church News

Eligible for call:

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Called by the church of Surrey,  
British Columbia:

**Rev. J.P. VanVliet**  
of Lincoln, Ontario.

Classis Ontario West will reconvene on June 29th in Ancaster (please note the change of location) in order to accommodate the preparatory examinations of two students and the colloquium of Dr. A.J. de Visser.

Called (a second time) by the church of London, Ontario:

**Rev. R.E. Pot**  
of Orangeville, Ontario.

## The body of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul writes extensively about the church using the imagery of "the body of Christ." He says, "The body is a unit, though it be made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:12, 13, 27). All individuals in the church are members of one and the same body. They are to use their gifts and talents for the benefit of other members. Every instituted church is a living organism. The church must function like a body. "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16).

We are to honour what the Bible says about the church. May the Lord keep us faithful as living members of his church. The church is the Lord's work and his dwelling place! May we have it in our hearts to speak correctly and appropriately about the glorious things He has and continues to do.



# The Ordination, Inaugural Sermon and Welcome evening of Rev. Carl Van Dam

On January 4, 2004 the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church at Grassie could finally witness the installation of their new pastor, (Stephen) Carl Van Dam. Depending on whether members originally hailed from the Lincoln or Smithville congregations (the two churches whose members formed Covenant church in 2001), it had been as long as five years since members had their own minister. The wait was now over, as God had answered their prayers. Rev. Van Dam would become Covenant's first minister, and Covenant, Rev. Van Dam's first congregation as pastor of the Word.

It was certainly an honour for Prof. C. Van Dam to lead the morning worship service. Ordinations are not common; rarely is one able to witness a graduate of the Theological College taking his vows to serve and lead a congregation. Even more uncommon is a father leading the service in which his son is ordained as minister of the Word. Although Covenant had been well served throughout its vacancy by professors of the College and ministers of adjacent churches within the classis, it was certainly a blessing for Covenant to receive its own minister from God's hands.

Prof. Van Dam's chosen text for the inauguration was 2 Timothy 4:1, 2 where Paul charges Timothy to "Preach the Word," a fitting selection for a new minister of that Word. The message focused on both the character and



*L to R: Mrs. J. Van Dam, Miss L. DeBoer, Rev. S.C. Van Dam, Dr. C. Van Dam, Mrs. J. Van Dam, Mrs. M. Buist*

consequence of this charge. Preaching the Word is an important task, both in its preparation and in its outcome. The preacher must be prepared, and always on task. As God's instrument, the preacher is not asked to state his opinions, but God's words. That being said, Prof. Van Dam pointed out that preaching is not a blind, theoretical exercise, but rather it must be relevant for the times and the church members, hitting home with those who hear it. Timothy is also warned that times will not always be easy, and ministers must not only teach and instruct, but also rebuke and correct in love and patience,

those who resent God. As a congregation of believers, we must all pray that this task might go on. If the minister is charged to encourage and admonish, mirroring his sender the one God Almighty, then the congregation becomes closer to God and each other also! The Word is then not only preached, it is multiplied by the congregation and each one becomes a carrier of it, encouraging others by it. Especially in this culture, which has become tired of the true Gospel, we may think that there is little future for it, but God will be triumphant! Woe to those who hear it, blessed are those who receive it!

The service was concluded with the ordination of br. Van Dam as minister of the Word, followed by words of congratulations from area ministers of the Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as numerous letters of congratulations.

If the morning service provided advice and an exhortation on how to complete this task, the afternoon inaugural sermon provided an indication of the willingness to do this, spurred on by a desire of the minister and an appeal to the congregation to assist, especially in prayer, so that the desired outcome might be achieved to God's glory. Rev. Van Dam's text focused on the growth of a congregation in love, just as Paul also prayed that the Philippian congregation might grow in love, "abounding more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" (Phil 1:9). This was illustrated in the character, result and goal of this growth in love.

Rev. Van Dam pointed out that the context of Paul's prayer was that love might abound "more and more," for simply maintaining the status quo leads to spiritual decline in the church. This growth in love is to occur through the depth of knowledge – for much love with little knowledge can lead to misguidings. Knowledge instead leads us to a deepening of love in God and for our neighbour, and where love abounds, we give God praise and glory. Through love, we are able to discern what is best so that we may be pure and blameless, conducting ourselves in a manner pleasing to God. The ultimate goal of this growth in love is twofold; the preparation for Christ's return and the praise of Christ. Rev. Van Dam asked that



*Rev. Van Dam and Miss DeBoer enjoying a humorous moment with the Covenant congregation.*

the congregation might pray for him to be focused and prepared in his task, just as he would also pray for the congregation to grow in love for God and each other.

After the Amen song of Psalm 43: 3-5, the congregation had a chance to officially congratulate their new minister at a coffee social, which could not take place after the morning service due to time restraints resulting from quadruple services held in the Smithville church each Sunday. It was certainly a memorable and blessed day for the Covenant congregation and its new pastor!

On the evening of Friday, January 30, the congregation of Covenant church came together to welcome their new pastor, Rev. Carl Van Dam, into their midst. The venue for this night of fellowship was the Canadian Reformed church building of Smithville; the present (but temporary) site of Covenant's

worship services. This evening, however, not only filled the church with sounds of praise, but also with the sounds of laughter and merriment.

Our officiate for the evening was one of the members of Council, Mr. Mark VanAndel, who had done much organizing behind the scenes to make the evening possible. Mr. VanAndel began by welcoming the members of the congregation and ensured an eventful evening. After singing Psalm 98:2, 3 where the congregation acknowledged the Lord's mercy and faithfulness, Romans 12 was read, highlighting the need of each member to use the different gifts "... according to the grace given us..." Following the opening prayer, a warm welcome was extended to Rev. Van Dam and his fiancée, Miss Lisa DeBoer. With the evening officially begun, the members were ready to enjoy the many, "different gifts."

## Letter to the Editor



### Letter to the Editor:

I would like to convey my appreciation to *Clarion* and to Rev. J. Visscher personally for the article "The Organist as Dinosaur," featured in your May 7 issue. In the task of organist and also as a music teacher, it is very encouraging to read such words.

Kent Dykstra  
Edmonton, Alberta

Always an enthusiastic congregation in terms of singing during worship services, the Covenant enthusiasm carried over to this evening as well. Many young(er) members offered their talents to the celebration with piano solos and duets, as well as vocal performances by individuals and the Covenant students from John Calvin School of Smithville. The contribution of the older members was also appreciated during the evening with musical offerings from the Covenant Choral Group as well as other individuals. The great vocal variety included accompaniment by piano, organ, and flute, as well as a showcase of yodeling talent.

With a rich and active society life in Covenant, there was no shortage of theatrical performances in the form of

skits. The varied skits were titled Dialing "1" for murder, big red lollipops, saving money and cutting church costs, and a car dealership performance by council members. Also entertaining and quite useful for Rev. Van Dam was the "Get to know the congregation" presentation. Next time Rev. Van Dam needs fresh flowers, auto body repair, landscaping, or delicious European delicacies, he will know where to go!

After learning much about the congregation he would be shepherding, the evening also included an opportunity for the congregation to learn more about the history of their new minister. This was accomplished through a PowerPoint presentation. With the aid of computer test and scanned photos, the life of the new pastor, both here in Canada and abroad, was documented.

At the conclusion of the evening, Rev. Van Dam was presented with two gifts. The first was a gift from the congregation, and it captured the beauty of the Niagara Escarpment, Rev. Van Dam's new "backyard," in the form of a framed picture. With the second gift, Council encouraged Rev. Van Dam to take the time to relax and enjoy himself, with the help of a set of golf clubs.

Before the meeting came to a close, Rev. Van Dam thanked the congregation for the warm welcome and expressed his desire to begin his task in earnest. It truly was an enjoyable evening. It was an evening where the congregation could thank the Lord not only for his abundant growth in terms of members, but also "living members." It was an evening where the members could thank the Lord that after only thirty months since being instituted without a pastor, the congregation could welcome Rev. Van Dam. And it was an evening where the entire congregation could come together and acknowledge that the Lord "...has remembered his love and his faithfulness. . ."



Photos courtesy: Mrs. Rennie Linde

Rev. Van Dam, consistory chairman Peter Feenstra and M.C. Mark VanAndel with gifts from Council and congregation.

# Reflections on a Trend in Missions (1)

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*The trend is that many of our youth are getting involved with so-called short-term mission (STM) trips.*

Over the last decade, a trend can be seen among the young people of our churches. The trend is that many of our youth are getting involved with so-called short-term mission (STM) trips. Of course, this phenomenon is not isolated to our churches. STM is exploding in the evangelical world. In 1965, perhaps 540 people from the United States went on an STM. Today, that number is likely over 1.4 million. 35,000 US churches are doing STMs, along with 3700 mission agencies, and over 1000 colleges and schools.<sup>1</sup> This exploding phenomenon is an important one that God is using to bring people to faith in his Son. I, for one, would probably not be a missionary if I had not gone on a kind of STM to the South American country of Suriname in 1992.

The STM movement involves young people going on trips to foreign countries to participate in some kind of work that serves God's kingdom. The "short" in short-term can be anywhere from one or two days to three or four years. Typically, the work involves some kind of gospel outreach, but some also include these sorts of activities as being STM: construction, medical or agricultural assistance, education and just plain hospitality.<sup>2</sup>

In this article and one following, I would like to reflect on this phenomenon. Let's take a look at the history of this trend in the broader evangelical world. Let's evaluate it from

the point of view of missions. And finally, let's take a critical look at the present appearance of this trend in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

## Brief history of STMs

Some make the claim that STMs can be found in the Scriptures themselves.<sup>3</sup> I find such claims dubious and we will not discuss them here. Our interest is more particularly in the modern history of STMs. Where do we begin? The rise of STMs begins in the southern United States in the 1950s and 60s. Agencies such as Operation Mobilization and schools such as Wheaton College were looking for ministry opportunities for young people and others. At the time, because of easy accessibility, the focus was on First Nations in the American Southwest and Mexico. Through the 1950s and 60s, small groups of American Christians spent short periods of time doing evangelistic work either on reservations or south of the border.

Since the 50s and 60s, the STM movement has grown exponentially. This can be accounted for in four ways. First of all, the development of viable commercial air transport after the Second World War made the world dramatically more accessible to North Americans. The growth of the North American economy is another factor. North Americans have relatively large amounts of disposable income compared to people in many other areas of the

world. The third factor is globalization. Because of television, Internet, and advanced telecommunications, the world has shrunk. Our perception of the world as North Americans is entirely different today. Many North Americans are intrigued by other cultures, rather than intimidated. Finally, today churches and their members want to be more directly involved with missions. These factors combined (and possibly others) have led to the rise of the STM movement in the last four decades. You can easily understand why three or four generations ago, such a trend would have been virtually impossible. The world of 2004 is much different than that of 1904.

## STM from a missions perspective

Reflecting on the STM movement from the perspective of missions leads one to make notations in both positive and negative directions. From the positive angle, sending young people (or others) on STMs can be a blessing for those who receive them in the host country or area. Sometimes a fresh face without baggage can accomplish more in one week than a compassion-fatigued long-term missionary has accomplished in several years. It can and does happen that the Lord works in this way.

Of course, there is also the cliché (by now) that the "goer-guests" themselves are spiritually enriched by a cross-cultural ministry experience.

Seeing believers in another culture, worshipping the Lord in another context – these can be powerful tools to stir up zeal for service. Sometimes (though not often – see below), the Lord uses these STMs to bring young people to full-time missionary ministry. And many times, the Lord uses these STMs to encourage a sagging personal faith. We cannot doubt this!

However, there are also many concerns with STMs. Some authors promote STMs as the be-all and end-all of the Christian mission. However, it has to be recognized that STMs have their serious limitations. One of these, mentioned by missiologist Ralph Winter, is that tackling profound and ugly problems in missions cannot be solved by short-termers.<sup>4</sup> Let me assure you from personal experience that there are some very profound and ugly problems out there! These problems cannot be solved by someone who comes to a given area for a short-term.

Another concerned mentioned by Ralph Winter is that the explosion in STMs has not been matched by an explosion in the number of full-time Christian workers, ministers or missionaries.<sup>5</sup> Yes, one or two here and there. But not an explosion! Why not? We could speculate on the reasons. Perhaps it is because too many short-termers view their trip as a cross-cultural holiday. Perhaps it is because short-termers lack the maturity and commitment to go the long haul. Regardless of the reasons, we have to admit that there is a problem here.

More concerns about STMs come from another former evangelical missionary.<sup>6</sup> Jim Lo cites the following:

1. Lack of training – “I do not need to be trained to be a missionary since God has made me a missionary already.”

2. Many view their trips as a “spiritualized vacation.”
3. Self-centredness – “Self-centered team members don’t care if they destroy the culture with their ethnocentric ways or insult nationals with snide comments.”
4. “Youth camp” mentality – a mother said, “I sent my son on a STM trip to give him something to do during the summer. I did not want him to be bored staying at home.”

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*Seeing believers in another culture, worshipping the Lord in another context – these can be powerful tools to stir up zeal for service.*

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I would add one final concern of my own. STMs always seem to be one way. Believers from the USA and Canada go to other countries. With this, there seems to be the idea that we North Americans are the only ones with something to offer. However, God gives gifts to *all* Christians, not just to relatively wealthy ones. Believers in other places also have something to offer us. Let me ask a question: Why do we not raise money in Canada to send a team of believers from the Dominican Republic to help us with some project, perhaps evangelizing our downtown core or helping us at CampFire? Not only would we benefit from their gifts (which they surely have!), but they would also have the opportunity to personally benefit themselves. In this way, STMs become a two-way street, rather than the North

American centred one-way street currently in use.<sup>7</sup>

Let me conclude this first article by saying (with countless other critics) this: I am not against STMs. However, we do need some serious critical reflection on how these trips are organized and administered. Most of all we need some serious thought given as to the purpose of these trips. I agree with Ralph Winter that it is better to envision STM trips as a means of exposing people to worthwhile mission work being done by long-termers.<sup>8</sup> STMs have value in terms of maturation and education – but they are limited in what they can accomplish in terms of real advances for God’s kingdom in cross-cultural contexts. In the next article, we will look at how the trend is being played out in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

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<sup>1</sup> *Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission*, Roger Peterson, Gordon Aeschliman, R. Wayne Sneed, Minneapolis: STEM Press, 2003, pp.252-253.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, passim.

<sup>4</sup> “Editorial Comment” by Ralph Winter, in *Mission Frontiers*, March/April, 2004, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> “What have we done?” by Jim Lo, in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 36.4 (October 2000), pp.436-438.

<sup>7</sup> I give credit here to Drs. C.J. Haak who planted the seed for this proposal in personal conversation. Cf. *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions*, Leslie Newbiggin, Eerdmans, 1994, p.115: “. . . I know that England needs the witness of a Christian from India at least as much as India needs missionaries from the West.”

<sup>8</sup> “Maximum Impact Short-Term Mission (Review)” by Ralph Winter, in *Mission Frontiers*, March/April 2004, p.12.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

# Lord's Day 13



*Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.*

"I'll have a little sister soon!" says Megan Kok to her friend. "A sister? Are you sure? What if it is a boy?" But no, it really is a sister. She was born in Columbia, but she is an orphan; she does not have a father and mother any more.

After a while she came. She and Megan share the bedroom. She had to get used to her new life. But now she feels at home. She says Mom and Dad, and her name is now Sharon Kok.

Father and mother have adopted Sharon as their own daughter. She is their child by adoption.

You know that Jesus Christ is the real Son of God, his Father. He is the only one who has the same nature as the Father. But God also has adopted children. Just as Sharon could become the daughter of the Kok family, we may become part of God's family. You too! Our heavenly Father has adopted us.

Long ago, when Jesus Christ was still teaching on earth, He already spoke about this to the people. He said: Who does the will of my Father, is my brother and my sister.

Sharon had to come all the way from Columbia. That cost a lot of money: the

flight and many other things had to be paid for. But our adoption was much more costly than that! When we were adopted by God, no money was paid and no credit card was used. Jesus Christ paid for our adoption with his blood, with his death on Golgotha. And that was how we became children of God.

Jesus once said that only the people who do God's will are allowed to continue living in God's house as his children. God wants us to love him and to serve him. You are allowed to live with God as his adopted child, and now he wants you to show yourself a good and obedient child.

Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God, but He is also our Lord. That word is used for very important people, who have much power. It means that someone is the master; he has the right to rule over a whole province, or even a whole country. Other people have to obey the commands of someone who is a master, a Lord. That is also the case with Jesus Christ. When we call him Lord, we say that he is our Master. He gives us instructions, and we have to obey Him.

And He is powerful. As Lord He is much stronger than God's enemy, Satan. Satan has great influence in this world. But the Lord Jesus has much more power. He says to Satan: My people belong to me, and they will never belong to you. I will take care of them.

Remember that: Jesus Christ is our Lord, and we are his possession.



# West Timor Mission on the Way

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*The trend is that many of our youth are getting involved with so-called short-term mission (STM) trips.*

In a previous issue of *Clarion* we shared some general information about West Timor and the ordination of Smithville's missionary, Reverend Ed Dethan, on June 29, 2003. After this ordination, the family (Rev. Ed, his wife Femmy, and baby Moses) made further preparations for their move: "Our aim is to get into the plane no later than the 15th of September. Not because we do not love you but because of our commitment to the Lord. The sooner the work starts, the better, and I am sure that you would like to see that too. Please pray that the Lord may open the way for speeding the process." In this contribution we give an update on what transpired since, quoting liberally from their reports.

The Dethans' arrival in Timor "was a big surprise for family and friends. Some of them were in shock, for they did not know what to do with us. My foster Dad cried seeing his son coming home with a big family, a wife and a son. The first week, when we were here, Moses was always crying. So, we thought that he must miss Canadian weather. But one night, he cried and cried for such a long time and his temperature went up to 39°C. Thus, we decided to take Moses into the hospital. It appeared that he had a "respiratory infection." He has medicine for it and he is almost cured. We may pray that this little guy may also recover from all the sickness that he has."



*Some members of the Friday Bible study in Dalam Tuak.*

## Moving in

For the first couple of weeks, the Dethans ate "breakfast in one house, lunch in another house, and supper and slept in another different house." This turned out to be especially challenging for Femmy, who had to learn a different social context, language, and culture. Seeking their own house, they initially settled for a small apartment some distance from where the intended mission field would be. It had a bedroom and a living room, while the kitchen and washroom had to be shared with ten university-student families. By knocking on doors and asking people for a place

to rent, they finally found a three-room house with a telephone, "But the problem in this house was that it was so dirty. All the walls are very dirty, the washroom and the kitchen have not been washed maybe for almost three months."

Moving in implied new social contacts. In true Indonesian style, a brief visit could stretch a bit. "The other day, we were eating lunch; then some people from the neighbourhood came, and I stopped eating and came to the door. Just to let you know that it is impolite (here) to just stand at the door and ask 'how can I help you?' So, I thought well, they are not going be long anyway, why not invite them to sit down for a bit, so

that they can say what they want to say. Femmy and my sister also thought that these people are not going to be long, because they knew that we are having lunch. They waited for five minutes, ten minutes, then half an hour. Femmy was wondering why I can't go back to eat anymore. Well, two hours later they say good bye, but then standing at the door still talking for more than half an hour. Well, that's life here."

"The people around us already know who we are. There is a Roman Catholic person in front of our house, and he already invited us for supper. Beside our house is a Muslim couple. And the wife of the Muslim fellow always comes to our house and talks to Femmy. People really like Femmy because of her friendliness. One lady came up to me and said that I am lucky to have Femmy. I replied 'it is a blessing that Femmy has me.' Femmy is indeed adjusting well with the culture and the language."

### Starting mission

"My priority in these couple of months is to introduce myself to the government, society and the churches around here. A couple of days ago I was asked to give a speech to certain young nurses, about 'marriage in the Lord.' There were a lot of questions about how one should choose for his or her partner. What should be the criteria? It was interesting that I was asked by these nurses while some of them are not believers. Although this was not my real work, yet I took the opportunity to give the speech, so that I could be known by the society."

Other opportunities presented themselves as well. They visited a family, and "not long after introducing ourselves to the host, we look at the



Driving through the rice field.

windows and saw that there are more people in front of the house. It appeared that those people would like to check us out because we are new in the area. It was around six o'clock, and there was no electricity in the house yet. So, we are talking to each other in the darkness. That's the first impression with the people that I will be working with. We pray and hope that the Lord will open the door for more opportunities like that."

*All the walls are very dirty, the washroom and the kitchen have not been washed maybe for almost three months.*

"Moses is such a big help for me in terms of doing this mission. Our landlady (Tante Lisa) would always take Moses any time. So, wherever she takes Moses, she would tell people about us. One day, I took Moses for a walk, and people came and held Moses without asking me whether they could hold him or not. They did not know that I am Moses' father. They just think that I am one of Moses' father's relatives. Later, I told them that Moses is my son, they became even friendlier to me. What a blessing to have Moses around!"

### Accident

The LORD spared the lives of the Dethan family in a motorcycle accident. "The traffic in Kupang is a bit hectic. People do not drive according to the rules. I was indeed scared that I would get into the accident because of the way people drive, but I had no choice. But because of this accident, I don't have any courage to drive the motorbike anymore. We went to the Emergency and found out that nothing major happened to the three of us." In the process, they also received confirmation that they are expecting another baby.

The accident also turned out to be a way in which spreading the Gospel was helped. Rev. Dethan reflects on how a home coming is very special, and for him certainly, as it was a calling: "Going back to your home town and putting into practice what the Lord has taught you in the past years. But having the excitement does not mean that we can do things smoothly as we plan to do. Satan also has his agenda to prevent the spreading of the gospel and advancing God's kingdom. You already heard about the accident that we had. Should we give up? *Definitely not!* Satan may have his agenda for his purpose but the Lord controls him and the Lord can work in 'all things' in order to bring benefit for His children (Rom 8:28). I will show you how the Lord works through our accident."

Rev. Dethan was raised Roman Catholic by his great-aunt and great-uncle, who opposed his choice to study Reformed theology. "Three years ago, my foster mom passed away. Now, my foster father slowly changed his mind. He allowed me to continue to study in Canada and was really looking forward to seeing me and the family come home. After the motorcycle accident, he urged the families and me to have a welcome evening and at the same time a thanksgiving that the Lord has saved our lives from danger. He invited the families of the people who hit us with the motorbike (they are also Roman Catholic people) to come to the welcome evening as well. He knows that I am a minister-missionary, yet he is not scared of arranging this welcome evening for us. There were around 400 - 500 people and 70 % of the guests were Roman Catholic. It was a great opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to the community, for there were members of the local government and even some members of the

parliament of the province. The evening was opened by prayer and a short meditation and then later on Femmy and I were given the opportunity to give a speech. Femmy did a great job, all in Indonesian! The speech was so interesting that even the people who walked by on the street stopped and listened to Femmy. The tent and the street were full with people." This event led to more contacts with the community and government officials, and that they see how the Lord controls the world and plans their lives.

### Changes

Rev. Dethan notes the increase in traffic and shopping malls, and a deterioration of the Timorese' morals since he left for Canada in 1997. He senses rebellion against parental direction among young people, which generates problems in the community. Buses now attract passengers with loud rock and roll music. People have no clue what the songs are about, but they love it because of the heavy beat. What has not

changed is that shopping for groceries is ladies' work. Because of Femmy's pregnancy-related restrictions, Rev. Dethan now "makes the record in Kupang, the only male who does the groceries every week!!" In addition, he also helps do the laundry, boil the water (for drinking), and clean the house. Femmy adds, "We do have a cousin living with us who has been a great help. She comes from a big family with lots of mouths to fill, so in that way they are glad that she stays with us. She still goes to school, so during that time Ed has to stay home."

Femmy tells about their invitation to a wedding. It was on a hot day, during a worship service. Just as the pastor was "mentioning his theme and points, one of those tropical rains started. It made it nice and cool right away, but the church, having a sink roof, it gave a lot of noise as well, so loud that we could not here the minister preach. Well, now what, sing a psalm, sing another, and another, waiting for the rain to stop. Which did not happen, it turned out that he never got to finish his sermon. As it got close to 12 o'clock, and still raining, people started going home, or to the reception. As usual this takes place at the bride's home, plastic is being put up against the sun, or rain, but with a rain like this it had no chance, and a mudslide had soon formed itself. Everybody had to be cramped inside the house." In addition, the cooking was done inside as well, over an open smoky fire. "I'm always a bit nervous when it comes to eating in people's homes, because it's usually very spicy for me, if I ask, is it spicy? they will say oh, no not at all, but then after taking a bite, it burns down your throat, face beet red and your plate full. Ah, well, just be brave, eat quickly and drink lots of water!"



Family picture

## Mission progress

The culture affects how the mission work progresses. At Dalam Tuak (“In the Palm-wine”) a Saturday-night Bible-study had been organized. The first night, nobody showed up: even the host was away at a meeting for the preparation of a brother’s wedding. “You probably think it is very rude of them not to fulfil their promise to meet here. But the problem was not the promise, the problem is the life style over here. Most people do not work with a schedule. We have to play by ear of what to do so that we do not waste our time.” Rev. Dethan made the best of it by visiting some people in the area. The meeting was rescheduled for the following Saturday-night, but it had to be “cancelled because Femmy was sick and Moses was being a bad boy, screaming around and only wanting to be held. I sent a message to the people saying that I could not make it. The next day, I heard that there were more than ten people waiting for me. Well, that’s too bad. I again made another arrangement to meet with them for the next Friday.”

“That Friday the three of us, jumped in the car and drove out there. The rain was pouring, but we did not want to postpone it again. Because of the rain we entered a very muddy village, and flooding all over the road. I could not even see the road anymore, but we managed to get to the meeting, of course a bit late. But as soon as they saw us, they came with flashlights and umbrellas to help us out. We were surprised with the attendance and the weather being so bad. I was glad that Femmy and Moses could make it to the meeting as well, since there were more ladies than gentlemen and so Femmy took the opportunity to talk with the ladies. I spoke to them about ‘faith and true faith.’ They asked a lot of questions about the difference between Christian faith and other faiths. I referred to our



First apartment

Catechism Lord’s Day 7. It was too bad that these people do not have any catechism books, and most of them had not even a Bible in their hands. I have tried to find catechism books in the store but it appeared that those books are no longer published because not so many churches are interested in it. Anyway, even though they did not have those books, yet we managed to discuss some essential parts. We decided then that the Bible study will continue.”

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*It was too bad that these people do not have any catechism books, and most of them had not even a Bible in their hands.*

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When it was time to leave, “We started the car, but the car did not want to move at all. What is going on? It appeared that all the tires had sunk into the road. Well, what can you do? Digging? Oh No!, thankfully we had enough strong people willing to help push the car, after some hard work and being soaked we were ready to go. Well, it was a nice experience!” Having strained his voice to be heard while the rain poured down on the zinc roof, “by the time we got home my voice was gone, I got a fever and

started coughing. It appeared that I have bronchitis, and of course I passed it on to Moses who has been quite cranky under it. Please pray that these things will not be a hindrance for our work here. Well, it seems to be that things do not just fall into place according to what we plan. We depend on God’s grace; whether you live in the West or down here, you really have to depend on God.”

## Conclusion

“The Lord controls this world including the rain and drought and therefore our mission work; He definitely has a purpose for all these things, and we are part of his program. Maybe this rain was not so good for us, yet the Lord gives it for his purpose, so that his name will be glorified. Who are we to complain about having so much snow or rain? If we understand that we are part of his program and not visa versa then we may be encouraged to pray continuously that his Word may be preached without hindrance to those who are far away, to those who are hungry and thirsty for his Word. May the LORD bless you and your family as you enter the New Year, the year of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for you all and we thank you all for your e-mails and prayers. May the LORD, our covenant God, continue to be with you all.”

Please visit the Mission Timor website for more details, pictures, and information at [www.missiontimor.com](http://www.missiontimor.com).