

WINTER/SPRING 1997

Channels

A quarterly publication of The Renewal Fellowship Within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

In this issue:

*articles by J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg, Jacob Birch, Eugene H. Peterson,
Jonathan Shaw, Reviews and more...*

Cover photo:

An example of "already/not yet,"
we often experience in our lives.
On the West coast we see signs of
Spring, yet it's not here completely
So it is with salvation - we
experience the down payment,
yet long for the fullness.

(Photo: Owen Hayes)

Channels

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MEMBER

The Canadian Church Press

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The opinions expressed in this magazine represent something of the wide diversity of those committed to the cause of renewal in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

We welcome submission of articles, reviews (books and other media), letters of comment and/or constructive criticism, and items of news. However, we reserve the right to choose and edit material.

Articles, letters, and reviews and books for review should be sent to:

Dal Schindell, c/o 5800 University Boulevard, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 2E4.

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Not All Glitz and Glamour: A Canadian Church Leadership Conference

J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg

Northview Community Church, a successful seeker-sensitive “subsidiary” of the Mennonite Brethren in Abbotsford, with a current total attendance of nearly 3,000 people at one Saturday evening and two Sunday services each weekend, and one of the fastest growing churches in Canada — it is already planning for an attendance of 9,000 — recently held its third annual Leadership Conference, cleverly entitled: “Online with God’s Web Site: God’s Vision for Your Church in This Generation,” February 6 - 8. Operating under the visionary slogan “leading people to passionately follow Jesus,” this is a congregation that is committed to carefully focused and biblical “core values” which shape it to communicate “in a contemporary style that ministers to our culture.”

Over 170 pastors and lay people paid to see and hear what this kind of church is all about — but they didn’t have to pay very much. A modest and graduated fee ranging from \$50.00 for alumni to \$95.00 for late registration (and payable in Canadian funds!) included two full days of presentations, a binder, hearty snacks and two lunches. A number of people came from as far

away as Ontario and Manitoba in the east and Washington state and California in the south. Intriguingly, few from Abbotsford were in attendance. The majority of attendants represented the usual evangelical and renewal-minded denominations you might expect to find at such a conference; however, there were also a couple of Christian Reformed and Presbyterians, and even one United Church attendant. The majority came from the provinces of Alberta and B.C. Congregations from Burnaby, Surrey and Edmonton were represented by 10 delegates; one congregation from Edmonton sent 35.

This appears to be an increasingly significant church leadership conference for Christians in Canada. Two previous leadership conferences, held at Northview in 1995 and 1996, have drawn 30 and 50 participants respectively. What makes it unique is that Northview is a Canadian “seeker-driven” or “seeker-targeted” model. While many Canadians have attended similar conferences at famous churches like Willow Creek, Illinois and Saddleback, California, this conference sincerely sought to address Canadian concerns.

Admittedly, the conference began with a contemporary bang — a la David

J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg

*J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg is the
minister of Calvin Presbyterian
Church, Abbotsford, B.C.
and editor of Channels.*

Letterman — “The Top Ten Myths” about Northview; ranging all the way from the ludicrous idea that “the baptismal tank doubles as a Jacuzzi,” or that “the average age” of attendees “is sixteen,” (the average age is actually in the 30 - 40 range) to a figment of the imagination that “all pastoral staff receive a BMW as a signing bonus.” But it was immediately clear that Northview knows how to have fun — the staff were obviously enjoying this — and it was a sign that these folk are very⁷ adept in the wizardry of synchronizing computer graphics on a screen.

This was followed by thirty minutes of “pumped up” yet worshipful praise, led by their professional songleader, with an amplified acoustic guitar and a wireless headset microphone, accompanied by a young woman playing a synthesizer. Northview staff write a number of their own songs.

The first of our four keynote “main frame” addresses by the senior pastor, Dr. Vern Heidebrecht: “Making God’s Heart Your ‘Home Page’” was positive and motivational and often biblically-based. Two of these other talks were “Embracing Gods Web Site” and “Bringing Your Church Up to Speed ... Gods Speed.”

There were two opportunities to hear panels of Northview pastors, sometimes including elders or members on the panel, entitled “downloading,” on such topics as: “Ironing Out the Wrinkles of Change”; “The Care and Feeding of a Rare Canadian Breed: the Volunteer”; “The Hardline or the Fineline: Exercising Church Discipline” — as one of their “core values.” Northview believes that “following Christ is demonstrated through authentic biblical lifestyle and mutual accountability”: “When the Call Becomes All: Burnout or Balance”; “Transferable Concepts: Can These Principles Apply to the Small Church?; and, “Hot Flashes” Living within Personal Purity and Ministry Boundaries.”

In the session on working with “change,” the leaders had time to share only one or two items; unfortunately, the size of the group attending these sessions did not allow for interactive or intensive discussion. Nevertheless, the

session on “burnout” showed a welcome amount of vulnerable transparency and honesty in what it meant to be “over the line.” The staff evidenced surprising maturity in spite of their predominantly youthful attitude and age. The average age of the staff, excepting the senior pastor, is under 35. Further, one could see that they were obviously enjoying this opportunity to reflect on their own ministry. On a number of occasions I could see that this conference was every⁷ bit as pleasurable and useful a learning experience for Northviews own participants as it was for those who came.

There were four opportunities to catch a bit from the Northview “information highway” on such topics as:

“Growing the Church Through Small Groups” — as another core value, Northview believes that “small groups” — not the pastors — “are the primary means of extending care and community to the whole congregation”; “Keeping a Growing Church Financially Healthy: Philosophy, Practice and Pitfalls” — Northview believes that “the management of church and personal finances will be consistent with biblical principles”, “Visionary Elders: Building a Church that Leads” — Northview believes that “the Church is led by congregationally discerned leaders and empowering people for ministry according to their gifts”; “Worship - Never a Dull Moment: The Philosophy Behind the Fun” — Northview believes that worship must be “in a contemporary style” and that “the Scriptures must be taught with a practical bent for life application” — their worship is done in what they term a “free flowing” rather than liturgical style; “Shaping Your Core Values”; “Recruiting and Retaining Excellent Pastoral Staff”; “Building Vol-

The staff evidenced surprising maturity in spite of their predominantly youthful attitude and age.

unteers for the Long Haul”; “Entry Level Events - Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God” — Northview believes that “special events are strategic entry-level opportunities for outreach”; “Bringing Change without World War 111”; Cutting Edge and Cutting Corners; Technology in the Church”; and, sharing the “Ministry Implications” of Northview’s childrens, youth, adult and mission ministries.

Northview’s “core value” about mission believes that “the church” will promote the participation of each individual in a cross-cultural mission experience.” Leaders want people at Northview to ask, “When is it my turn to go?”

Clearly Northview’s ministries cover a wide range of ages, single as well as married people. They attempt to address family and marriage enrichment issues and work hard at seeking to deal redemptively with marital breakdown and divorce. Because their Saturday night and Sunday services crowd their facilities with worshippers and childrens programs, Northview has committed itself to offer and develop a Monday night college-type adult education program called “CORE” (Christians On the Road to Excellence) training.

I personally found Northview’s principles on “shaping core values” and “building a visionary team” to be the most

useful, practical and adaptable principles I could eventually apply to my own situation.

There were also two opportunities to join a more casual, smaller group, in working lunches, entitled “troubleshooting,” which allowed for a little more conversation “Who Pastors the Pastor? Tips on Maintaining Spiritual Fervour”; “Working Harder or Smarter? Tips on Getting Organized”; “Grappling with God’s Vision for Your Church: Now What?” and “How to Work These Principles into Your Setting.” Northview folk seem to be aware of the dilemmas in building bridges from conference to congregation, from ideal to real situations.

Although the conference was well-organized and professionally presented, friendly and long-suffering volunteers were evident and appeared happy to serve. This was no Americanized glitz and glamour show. Vern Heidebrecht summed up Northview’s and his own experience in his closing address, with which many conferees appeared to agree — as they came to pray at the front of the room at the closing service of the conference — that the church often grows best through “crashes and viruses” and “brokenness” and “weakness” rather than strength.

The next conference is scheduled for February 5 - 8, 1998.

One to One

Jacob Birch

*Finally a program for youth that fits every Canadian Presbyterian church that has a heart for youth and a faith in God! It doesn't matter if you have only one (or two hundred) youth for this to work well. It is a return to the basics of prayer and caring and as Alfred Lord Tennyson has said,
"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of"*

The program Jacob Birch (former Youth Pastor at Bridlewood) describes is being done at Bridlewood Presbyterian Church in Scarborough but I have spoken to youth leaders at other churches who offer a similar program with slight variations. Some, for example, never allow the adult to approach the teen while others encourage "natural contacts" where the adult asks if there is a specific prayer request the teen wants to share. Obviously, we need to be sensitive not to embarrass the teens or the adults praying but each congregation can act according to its own custom. What is most important is that the whole program be done with sensitivity and earnestness.

"One to One" is not yet another program designed to revitalize the young people of your church. It is not fancy or expensive or complicated. Whether your church is large or small, rich or poor, urban or rural, "One to One" is one way you can make an eternal investment in the lives of your young people. Very simply, "One to One" is one adult praying for one young person once a day. (We have set the article so it can be photocopied and the "Partner Cards" cut out.) *Calvin Brown.*

"One to One" is a prayer ministry that we have started here, at Bridlewood Presbyterian Church. We noticed that we were spending a lot of time planning events and building relationships but spent very little time growing a solid base of prayer support for the youth ministry. We had enlisted prayer partners for the ministry in general but

had not called on individual adults to pray for individual young people on a daily basis. That's when God stepped in with Colossians 4:12 where Paul writes that Epaphras, one of the members of the church at Colossae was, "always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Based on Epaphras' example we started "One to One" where we enlist, train and support *one adult to pray for one young person, once a day.*

To begin a "One to One" prayer ministry in your church for your young people simply follow these five steps below.

1. Each young person fills out a "One to One" Student Form. (The Student Form asks for information that will help their Adult Intercessor pray for them on a daily basis.)
2. Each interested adult fills out a "One to One" Adult Intercessor contract. (This outlines the responsibilities of an Adult Intercessor.)
3. Designate a leader to match one Adult Intercessor with one Young Person and communicate that to both parties via the "One to One" Partner Card.
4. If you have an imbalance of available adults or young people, double up until either more adults come forward to pray, or for more young people arrive to be prayed for.
5. Hold a "One to One" night where students and Adult Intercessors get to meet for a time of fellowship in a relaxed non-threatening environment of fellowship.

One to One ADULT INTERCESSOR

JOB DESCRIPTION AND CONTRACT

FUNCTION

The primary function of the One to One Adult Intercessors is to pray faithfully every day for their One to One Student Partner.

QUALIFICATIONS

- F** - Faithful (1 Corinthians 4:1-4)
- A** - Available (5-60 minutes/day)
- T** - Teachable (2 Timothy 2:1-1)

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Pray for your assigned Student Partner once a day, every day for one year.
2. Attend the two One to One partner events, as able.

RETURN EXPECTATIONS

1. The Youth Director commits to pray for you everyday.
2. The Youth Director commits to provide you with one Student Partner for which you can pray every day for a year.
3. The Youth Director commits to provide you with a bi-monthly One to One update letter and prayer calendar.

One to One PARTNER CARD

Please pray for these items ...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

One to One PARTNER CARD

My One to One Student Partner is

One to One

Student Form

"... Always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" - *Colossians 4:12*

One to One is a prayer ministry dedicated to recruiting, training and supporting One adult to pray for One young person Once a day. Use the profile below to pray diligently and intelligently for this young person who desires your prayers everyday for the next 12 months.

Name: _____ Sex: Male _____ Female _____

Age: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

Parent(s) Names: _____

Sibling(s) Names: _____

Address (optional): _____

Telephone (optional): _____

Favourite Music: _____

Favourite Movies: _____

Favourite TV Show: _____

Favourite Bible Story: _____

Favourite Hymn/Song: _____

Pray for the following things everyday ...

Request #1 _____

Request #2 _____

Request #3 _____

Request #4 _____

One to One

PARTNER CARD

My One to One Student Partner is

One to One

PARTNER CARD

Please pray for these items ...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Generosity:

David at the Brook Besor

1 Samuel 30

Eugene H. Peterson

“Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?” Then the King will say, *I’m telling you the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.*”
- Matthew 25:37-40 (RSV)

The Brook Besor marks an important episode in human history. An event was enacted there that’s definitive for people whose family tree goes back to Jesus, a tree of life with roots in David. I’ve never understood why the Brook Besor doesn’t rank along with other definitive place names, such as Bethany, Galilee, Shiloh, Calvary, and Bethel. But that portion of the David story that originates at the Brook Besor keeps being reenacted among men and women who stay in touch with the God of their everydayness.

Names are important. They identify particular places, specific persons. They save us from the swamps of undifferentiated generality. They protect us from the arid wastelands of abstraction. A name is a lifejacket that keeps us afloat in the ocean of anonymity. What’s your

name? Where were you born? Where do you live? Who is your God? Names locate and identify. Generalities and abstractions, useful as they are in their own way, are as useless for actual nutrition as the label on a can of refried beans, listing: calories 120, sodium 570mg, carbohydrate 28g, protein 7g - excellent information, but certainly not food for the hungry.

Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “I was always embarrassed by the words *sacred*, *glorious* and *sacrifice*, and the expression *in vain*. Abstract words such as *glory*, *honor*, *courage*, or *hallow* were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates.”

The Brook Besor is narrative nutrition: a story that feeds an essential aspect of our God-designed humanity. In a world of disembodied advice it puts our size-seven bone-and-flesh feet on dirt and rock ground. I want to pull the Brook Besor from its undeserved obscurity and put it on our maps—name what we might otherwise miss because we had filed it under some category such as “care,” or “charity,” or “generosity.”

THE WASTING OF ZIKLAG

The story begins in disaster. David and his company of six hundred men, off on a military mission with King Achish of



Eugene H. Peterson

Dr. Peterson is the James Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver.

This article is chapter 10 of his new book, Leap Over a Wall, and appears by permission.

Gath, had left their wives and children at Ziklag unprotected. A raiding band of Amalekites, persistent and long-time enemies of Israel, came down on the village, captured the women and children for slaves, looted the place, and carried off a huge booty, leaving behind them nothing but smoking rubble.

When David's men returned, they were greeted by the rubble and smoke. The six hundred were a volcano of lament that soon turned into anger (lamentation often does)—great anger against David. He was their leader, after all, and shouldn't have left the village unprotected. The anger congealed into a plot to kill him. Grief clouded their minds; anger hardened their hearts. "David ought to be stoned," first uttered as whispered bitterness, quickly turned into a rallying cry, "Let's stone David!" (my paraphrase).

Catastrophe brings out either the best or the worst in us. At Ziklag it first brought out the worst. David had been leading these six hundred men along trails of salvation and providence through the wilderness years, bring beauty and holiness to their notice, leading them into lives of prayer, working the slow transformation from "the distressed, the debtors, and the discontented" into a company of friends and lovers. Two steps forward, one step back—or one step forward, two steps back. Spiritual formation is a slow business. And then this Amalekite disaster wiped out not only their homes and families but every bit of slowly acquired righteousness as well.

But catastrophe brought out the best in David. In the chaos of lamentation, anger, and bitterness, with storm clouds of murder rolling in across the horizon, we come on this wonderful line: "But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God (1 Sam.30:6). David prayed; David worshipped; David called on his pastor, Abiathar, for counsel. David went deep within himself, met God, and found

strength and direction to stride into the way of salvation. As his exterior world collapsed, he returned to the interior, rebuilt his primary identity, recovered his base. The moment of disaster freed him, immediately and amaz-

ingly, from the sixteen months of servitude under Achish, and David was dealing with God again—listening intently, obeying boldly. David and Abiathar came out from the place of quietness and counsel and prayer with a plan.

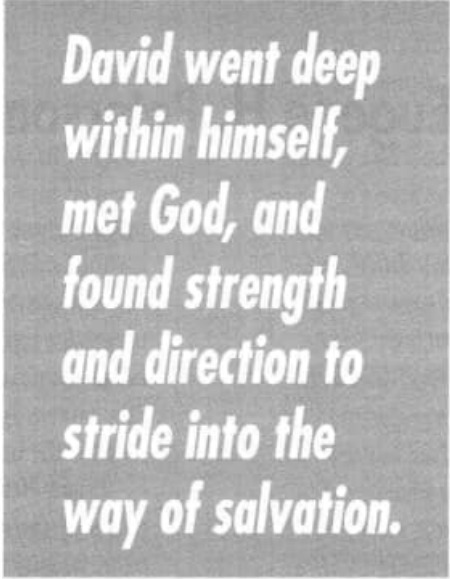
Now there was something to do, a strategy adequate to the disaster. But note the contrast. The company also had a strategy, but it was conceived in bitterness—kill David. There's an enormous amount of outrage in the world that's converted into angry plans of attack and destruction. A great deal of social action and political reform is fueled by anger; the results are nearly always worse than the conditions that provoked the action. If we're going to

do something about what's wrong with the world—the spectrum of wrongs stretches from marital fights to world wars, from disobedient children to destruction of the rain forests—we have to acquire a better base to work from than our anger. David's strategy came out of prayer and counsel. He set out to bring back the lost women and children.

THE SICK EGYPTIAN

David's six hundred men were ill-prepared to hunt down the Amalekite marauders. They had just returned from a long march back from the Philistine military front. They were fatigued. They were demoralized by the sack of Ziklag. And they weren't trusting David one bit. David's plan didn't seem at all promising.

But they went. David roused his troops to action and led them on a forced march south. Pushing hard for fifteen miles, they reached the Brook Besor. Two hundred



*David went deep
within himself,
met God, and
found strength
and direction to
stride into the
way of salvation.*

men, a third of Davids company, at that point were exhausted and unable to continue. They said, in effect, “We can’t go another step. We don’t have the strength and we don’t have the spirit. We’ve had it.” And so they were left, left at the Brook Besor.

David and his remaining four hundred men crossed the brook and continued deeper into the desolate desert badlands. They weren’t finding a trace of the Amalekites. As hour succeeded hour, it looked more and more as if they were on a wild goose chase. And then they came on a sick Egyptian, half dead.

A sick puppy of an Egyptian couldn’t have hoped for much in the way of care and compassion from a bunch of tired and vengeful Israelites. But somewhere along the way some of the old good Samaritan habits and desert hospitality that David’s company had practised kicked in, and instead of being kicked aside as a bother and encumbrance, the Egyptian was tended to: they gave him water and food—figs and raisins. It turned out that he was servant to one of the Amalekite rulers, but when he became sick he was abandoned—too much trouble to care for—and left behind in the desert to die. The poor wretch had had nothing to eat or drink for three days. David cared for him, fed him, and saved his life.

David knew something about being ill-used in the wilderness and then, in the midst of hardship, being treated generously. Psalm 36 bears all the marks of a wilderness experience, and it contains all the elements that came together for the Egyptian:

The God-rebel tunes in to sedition -
all ears, eager to sin.
He has no regard for God,
he stands insolent before him.
He has smooth-talked himself
into believing
That his evil
will never be noticed.
Words gutter from his mouth
dishwater dirty.
Can’t remember when he

did anything decent.
Every time he goes to bed,
he fathers another evil plot.
When he’s loose on the streets
nobody’s safe.
He plays with fire
and doesn’t care who gets burned.

God’s love is meteoric,
his love astronomic,
His purpose titanic,
his verdicts oceanic.
Yet in his largeness
nothing gets lost;
Not a man, not a mouse,
slips through the cracks.

How exquisite your love, O God!
How eager we are to run under your wings,
To eat our fill at the banquet you spread
as you fill our tankards with Eden spring water.
You’re a fountain of cascading light,
and you open our eyes to light.
Keep on loving your friends;
do your work in welcoming hearts.
Don’t let the bullies kick me around,
the moral midgets slam me down.
Send the upstarts sprawling
flat on their faces in the mud.

What David experienced from God, the Egyptian experienced from David: “Not a man, not a mouse, slips through the cracks.” And then eating his fill at a banquet of water and figs and raisins.

When we’re living this life right, this is what happens. We pass on the experience, pass on the God-experience to the people we meet. They experience a piece of what we’ve experienced in God.

Saved and grateful as a recipient of David’s Psalm 36 desert hospitality, the revived Egyptian told them where the Amalekites were. They had been on their way to a vic-

tory celebration when the Egyptian slave had fallen sick and been dumped. Knowing exactly where they had been headed, he guided David and his company to the place.

It was now dusk, and the party was in full swing—eating, drinking, dancing—whooping it up. Amalekites everywhere, feasting on the food and drink they had looted from Ziklag and other towns and villages in this, their latest piracy. They were far from the places they had pillaged and therefore hadn't set a guard. Carousing, they were sitting ducks for David's avengers. Soon they were dead ducks.

The recovery was absolute. Not a wife, not a child was lost. Nothing that had been stolen was missing. Not only that, but they also had the extensive Amalekite boot of flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. David and his men returned with everything and everyone in triumph. The so recently demoralized, grieving, and angry men were now ecstatic. And David, whom hours earlier they had been ready to kill, was honoured and acclaimed as they gave him all the credit, shouting out, *Zeh sh'lal David, zeh sh'lal David*, "This is David's spoil!" (1 Sam. 30:20).

AT THE BROOK BESOR

That sounds like the climax to the story, but it isn't. The climax takes place back at the Brook Besor. As the ecstatically victorious four hundred return to Ziklag, they arrive at the brook where they had left the two hundred. The exhausted two hundred, the two hundred who had had to drop out in mid-pursuit, the two hundred who had been soaking their feet in the brook and feeling left out of the action while the four hundred had been risking the terrors of wilderness and Amalekites. The left-behind two hundred were now up on their feet hugging and kissing their wives and children, delighting in the success that they hadn't been able to help bring about.

But there were mean-spirited men among the four hundred, who bristled at the notion of sharing the victory booty with their weaker brothers. It was enough that they get their wives and children back, but nothing else—not a single piece of Amalekite plunder, not so much as

one sheep or goat or heifer.

Just then David stepped in. His intervention is the climax to the story. David intervened at the Brook Besor, and his intervention is pure gospel. David ruled that everybody at the brook that day—the two hundred who had been unable to continue and had been given the undramatic, behind-the-scenes work of watching over the supplies at the brook (1 Sam. 30:24) and the four hundred who had fought for their lives—were equals and would share everything equally: "Everything we have is a gift from God; we share it with all who are saved by God" (1 Sam. 30:23-25).

The ringleaders of the "fairness" policy are called "wicked and base fellows" (1 Sam. 30:22). Strong words, it would seem, for what sounds like common sense and plain justice. Until we remember who these people are and where they are: these are the men of Ziklag with nothing in their backgrounds to be proud of, all of them picked up from a disreputable life and brought, through no merit of their own, into the net of God's providence and salvation. And the Amalekite chase itself? They had started out wanting to kill David, and only through David's prayer with Abiathar and their desert hospitality to the Egyptian had they gotten their families back.

Everything they experienced was sheer grace. How could they talk about dividing things up fairly? God was treating them with marvelous and generous grace; David would see to it that they treated one another with marvelous and generous grace.

"CARING IS THE GREATEST THING"

It's often remarked that David was a passionate man. He threw himself recklessly into whatever was there before him: song, battle, prayer, love, God. What's not as often noticed but is equally true is that he was a compassionate person. His passion was a community affair, compassion. He cared. He cared about others with the same passion with which he came before God.

David doesn't fit a preformed mold. When we enter the story of David, we don't find what our sociologists and

psychologists call a “role model,” a kind of slot into which we can slide without going through the pain of becoming human ourselves. He worked out firsthand what it meant to be alive before God in the midst of those who were concerned only with staying alive. His care for and sensitivity toward others had nothing to do with conforming to the expectations of others. He didn’t bend to the cowardice that we neutralize with our phrase “peer pressure.” But for all that, he cared for others. He would have nothing to do with a salvation that was for himself alone. He had no interest in a security gained at the expense of the people with whom he lived. He wasn’t out to save his own soul. He was, in a word, compassionate.

“Caring is the greatest thing,” said von Hügel. “Christianity taught us to care.” A generation later, WH. Auden brought out his ultimatum: “We must love one another or die.”

But we live in an age that has replaced compassion with sentiment. Sentiment is a feeling disconnected from relationship. Sentiment is spilled compassion. It looks like concern; it could develop into compassion, but it never does. Sentiment is the patriotic catch in your throat as the flag goes by—a feeling that never gets connected with the patriotic honesty of paying your income tax. Sentiment is the tears that flow in a sad movie—tears that never get connected with visiting your dying friend. We feel sorry for people; we lament the pain and suffering in the world. But having felt the internal motions of pity, wept a few requisite tears of sorrow, and sent off ten dollars to a charitable appeal, we’ve exhausted our capacity for care. In this callous, dog-eat-dog world, how sensitive we are! We return to our homes and jobs without knowing the names of the people we’ve shed tears over, without visiting a single prisoner whose fate we lament, without writing one letter to the lonely over whom our hearts break. And of course we let no strangers into our double-locked homes.

One of the supreme ironies of our age is that the society that has talked and written most about the fulfillment of the self shows the least evidence of it. People obsessed with the cultivation of the self have nothing to show for

it but a cult of selfishness. A few generations of economic affluence, political liberation, and religious freedom have [lowered into obesity, anxiety, and meanness. Happily, there are numerous exceptions; still, the generalizations are plausible. Our world is splendidly filled with glorious things and a glorious gospel but appallingly diminished in persons who celebrate them with passion and share them with compassion. We’re not the first generation to do this. Augustine looked at the world around him and acerbically observed that his parishioners were “more pained if their villa is poor than if their life is bad.”

One of the reasons that Christians are dispersed in the world is to recover a life for others and practise a priesthood of all believers—connect with others in an earthy, Davidic compassion so thoroughly that no expert or professional can ever again bluff us into passivity or consumerism.

David at the Brook Besor anticipates Jesus: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matt. 11:28-30, *The Message*).

I have a friend who sometimes signs her letters to me, “Yours at the Brook Besor.” She’s never explained to me what she means, and I’ve never asked her. What I imagine is that she sees herself as one of the two hundred at the Brook Besor, too tired to go on (she’s been living for a long time in Philistine country), feeling consigned to the sidelines because of her lack of stamina, resigned to a marginal status with the people of God but inwardly assured of God’s affirmation. And then hearing it again, undeserved and unexpected, the generous Davidic verdict. Brook Besor, indeed. 🍷

The One Essential

Jonathan Shaw

As I slowly worked my way up the narrow winding path of the gentle mountain slope, I could sense an almost tangible presence of the Holy Spirit. There was a peace and calm and awareness of the Spirit of the Lord like I had seldom experienced.

As I walked, I happened upon a small concrete bunker to the side of the trail, reminiscent of something seen in an old war movie. There were no windows, just a tiny door. From within could be heard what I can only describe, even though in a foreign language, as the “fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man.” Inside, I was told, was an individual who was spending the entire day on his knees in his “prayer bunker.” For anyone who has heard of the phenomenal growth of the evangelical church in South Korea, it is obvious that this and many other prayers like it, have clearly “availed much.”

What I experienced that day was a journey to the Prayer Mountain of—imagine this—a Presbyterian church just outside Seoul, Korea. If there has ever been any doubt about the ultimate effectiveness of prayer, the evangelical church in Korea has proven that prayer is indeed powerful.

It marked the beginning of a journey, which I daresay has taken too long, that brought me face-to-face with the issue of prayer within my own life, the

life of my church, and indeed the life of any Christian and congregation.

During that visit I also had the privilege to hear Jack Taylor, a pastor from Texas, who presented a series on prayer called, “The Seven Laws of Prayer.” If you ever want a wake-up call for your spiritual life, especially your prayer life, then try and wrestle with what he has defined as the first law of prayer:

“No believer’s spiritual life will rise to stay above the level of his/her praying.”

I tried to dispute this premise over and over, but the bottom line is: it’s true. In fact, the more I researched this statement, I found it in a similar form in many other books on prayer. Charles Cook says it this way: “The prayer

life of the Christian is the true gauge of all the rest of his life. As the water in the gauge glass and in the boiler always remain at the same level, the water in the one never rising higher than the water in the other, so no man’s outer life of activity ever rises above his inner prayer life.”

Leonard Ravenhill, in his classic, *Why Revival Tarries* states, “No man is greater than his Prayer life.” And the great preacher Charles Spurgeon, in his book *The Power of Prayer in a Believer’s Life* says, “Prayer is the true gauge of spiritual power. To restrain prayer is a dangerous and deadly tendency. This is a

Jonathan Shaw

Jonathan Shaw is a layleader and elder at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Parry Sound, Ontario, and serves as Chairperson of the Prayer Committee.

faithful saying: what you are upon your knees, you are really before your God.”

And if Taylor’s first law didn’t set you to thinking then try his second law:

“No church’s ultimate effectiveness will rise to stay above the level of its corporate prayer life.”

Wow! What does that say about the importance of corporate prayer within a congregation? While these two laws are intertwined, it was the second law, as it dealt with the ultimate effectiveness of the ministry and mission of any church, that led a number of members at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Parry Sound to launch, in February 1993, a Prayer Committee.

Now it could be said that the death of many good ideas has been to strike a committee, but we trust this has not been the case in this instance.

After the “OK” from Session, a group of men and women committed to prayer began to meet, and to pray. Our mandate was to promote, encourage and try to stimulate a greater participation in, and awareness of, prayer within our congregation. While it was generally accepted that our church had always been a church of prayer, we realized that to truly ensure that prayer is the very foundation of all other activities and ministry efforts within a church, it does take a specific and concerted effort.

As we met and asked the Lord, through our prayers, to show us ways to fulfill our mandate, we implemented some programs that we trust have been successful.

C.O.P.E.

(Challenge to Offer Prayer Evening)

What better name for a new approach to a traditional idea, the mid-week prayer meeting? This may represent one of the poorest attended and least interesting programs

in your church calendar, but it doesn’t have to. Every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m., for two-three hours, a group of faithful pray-ers have turned this meeting into the most exciting corporate prayer time many of us have ever experienced.

With a drop-in format, people are invited to come for as long as they want, with a break each half hour for coffee and fellowship. A large blackboard is filled each week with prayer and praise requests, and we have truly seen God answer prayer. The small, cozy nook in the basement that is our prayer corner has truly come to be “hallowed ground.” Over the years there have been many smiles and many tears. But as our congregation has gone through struggles and trials we know it is the hundreds of hours of prayer that have truly held our church together.

"No believer's spiritual life will rise to stay above the level of his/her praying."

PRAYER RETREATS

Twice each year, in the Spring and Fall, we plan a Prayer Retreat at a Muskoka camp. We invite members and families to join for us for a weekend of prayer, but also for praise, fellowship and a time of getting to know one another better. These weekends have come to be very special times in the life of our church. Truly we have discovered that as people meet, in small groups or in twos and threes and pray, we draw close to each other in a very special way.

PRAYER FOCUS EVENINGS

(Coffee House style)

Every second month or so, we set aside a Sunday evening service for a Prayer Focus evening. Using a very informal, 1960s style Coffee House format, complete with checkered tablecloths and candles, we meet for praise and small group prayer around our tables. We usually choose a theme in advance for a focus of our prayers. The prayer theme might be missionaries, evangelism or congrega-

tional needs. Our pastor — or someone on the Prayer Committee — leads the service. We get started with a time of praise and then break into small group prayer around the tables. We break every 5-10 minutes for a few more choruses and then more prayer. The sound of many prayers rising simultaneously from the tables is a real joy and inspiration.

YEAR OF PRAYER

We determined to identify 1996 as a Year of Prayer at St. Andrew's. This doesn't mean there should be less prayer in 1997 of course, but our attempt was through education, programs and various special activities, to really commit ourselves to prayer. We began with a series of messages from Rev. Jack Archibald (our pastor) and then had a service where we encouraged members to make a written Prayer Commitment for the year ahead.

PRAYER CALENDAR

Each month, a prayer calendar is included in our bulletin, indicating not just the activities of our church, but encouragement to pray for all the ministries of our church, both local and overseas.

So, what has it all meant? To be honest, there have been times as our committee met and planned events that we wondered if it was making any difference. Jack Taylor believes that Satan's singlemost important strategy to eliminate the effectiveness of the Christian and the church is to stop people from praying, and I believe this to be true. It is easier to get Christians involved in just about anything else, except prayer.

But we have persevered, and as we now look back, I believe that God has answered prayers, especially in regard to our church. St. Andrew's has had its fair share of crises and struggles in the last two-three years, but we stand today a church that is stronger and with a real growing sense of love and unity within our fellowship. To quote our pastor who said recently, "our church is on the verge of true spiritual renewal like it has never been in my ministry" We are all absolutely convinced this is because of prayer and God's answers to those prayers.

Without fail, true renewal and revival only comes after God's people show a willingness to fall on their knees and pray. Are you looking for renewal in your life and your church? There is only one true answer — Prayer!

SEVEN LAWS OF PRAYER

1. No believer's spiritual life will rise to stay above the level of his/her praying.
2. No church's ultimate effectiveness will rise to stay above the level of its corporate prayer life.
3. No church's corporate prayer life will rise to be greater than the quality of the prayer lives of those who make up its membership.
4. No believer's prayer life will rise in quality to stay above the level of his/her regular, daily, quiet time alone with God.
5. No believer's practice of prayer will be greater than his/her own view of prayer.
6. Praise is an indispensable factor in the prayer life, both individual and corporate.
7. The only way to learn to pray, is to pray.

Connections in a Disconnected World

J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg

We live in a world of disconnections
and these disconnections threaten to undo
our sense of community
as human beings and as Christians.

There are increasing disconnections between the people
among whom we live or work or worship or play.
These are often different people, different circles of acquaintance.

We are disconnected by many things we do not hold in common.

There are disconnections between regions of the country,
between generations,
between younger and older people,
between traditional and contemporary visions and values and styles.
There are disconnections between varying experiences and understandings,
differing opinions, ideologies and theologies.

There are disconnections of faith expression between denominations,
within them,
and among and within congregations.

J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg

*J.H. (Hans) Kouwenberg is the
minister of Calvin Presbyterian Church,
Abbotsford, B.C.
and editor of Channels.*

And then there are the “wildernesses” of our own personal disconnections:
personal dislocations, personal discomforts and personal distress.

In the midst of all this disconnection
I find the apostle Paul encouraging Christians
with a sense of the connectedness of faith and life.
Amidst the frenzy of disconnections faced by the Corinthian Christians,
Paul reaches back across the centuries of the history of his own people
to find a series of connections.

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud,
and all passed through the sea,
and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea,
and all ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink.
For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.
Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them,
and they were struck down in the wilderness.”

“These things happened to them to serve as an example,
and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.
So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.”

“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.”

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength,
but with the testing he will also provide the way out
so that you may be able to endure it.”

“Therefore my dear friends, flee from idols.
I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say,
The cup of blessing that we bless,
is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break,
is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
because there is one bread, we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.”
1 Corinthians 10:1-6,14-17 (NRSV)

Paul sees how disconnected sections of the church are connected in Christ.

“Our ancestors were all under the cloud” —
we have all experienced the mystery of what we believe to be God’s guidance;
“and all [have] passed through the sea”—
we have all experienced some liberating act of salvation
in the midst of particular and, perhaps, uniquely threatening circumstances;
“and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea” —
we have all been somehow baptized into the family of God
and into his “law” of freedom and love;
“and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink” —
we have all tasted of the best communion meal:
intimacy with God and with other people which bridges the disconnections.

Even going through “wilderness” experiences,
like Hebrew ancestors of old,
we have all drunk from the same “spiritual rock that followed them” —
that rock was God,
for Christians, revealed in Christ.

I’m glad that I belong to a connectional church,
a church that is always trying to work on the connections...
between the former covenant and the new,
between differing theologies and understandings,
between differing regions and constituencies.

I’m glad that our church is small enough to get to know each other
and large enough for varieties of gifts and views.

Those of us who have been together
on the Task Force for the Revision of the Book of Praise
can testify that we have been part of a connectional process.
And we’ve been able to do it, perhaps, on a deeper level than many other committees
or gatherings of the church,
because we have lived together — at least temporarily,
and worked and worshipped together,
and played together — a little, at least, as well.
We’ve been aware of some of the disconnections that we face;
yet, we have respected one another’s points of view, opinions and theologies.
We could have discussed and debated what divides us:

the different parts of the country from which we have come,
the different constituencies we represent,
and the varieties of experiences of faith which have formed us.
But instead of focusing on the disconnections
which divide us,
we have searched for and tried to use a language of connection.
And we have found that we are connected in many, many ways.

We have been privileged to focus,
many times,
on the worship of God in Christ;
in the varied language of the music of fellow Christians,
from many different backgrounds,
all over the world,
we have been connected in many ways.

We have rediscovered that "though many ... [we] are one body in the Lord."

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THE
Renewal *Fellowship*
WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA



Reviews

Stewart Matthew and Kenneth Scott. *Leading God's People: A Handbook for Elders and Ministers*, New Edition, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1995)

and

Stewart Matthew and Ken Lawson. *Caring for God's People: A Handbook for Elders and Ministers on Pastoral Care*, New Edition, (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1995).

As I talk to ruling elders in various parts of the country, I am impressed by how seriously they view their ordination vows. They want to be good elders. But I hear many of these same elders saying they don't know how to be an elder - they don't know what to do. They have not been trained to use their Christian leadership gifts, nor have they been given the tools to do pastoral care in their dis-

tricts and so they feel at sea. Therefore I was very glad to see that the Saint Andrew Press has printed new editions of these two books, which are an answer to the plea from those who want to better fulfill their calling as ruling elders.

Leading God's People is a handbook for the training of elders. There are six chapters focusing on helping elders develop their leadership skills and enhance teamwork within sessions. The opening chapter, "Baseline Thinking," give a solid theological foundation for what it is that the church is about, and the models of leadership found in the Bible. The second chapter outline the areas of session responsibility, making clear the size of the task a session faces. The third chapter, "Common Problems," takes a frank look at the kinds of problems that can develop on



TO: The Treasurer
The Renewal Fellowship Within The Presbyterian Church in Canada
381 9 Bloor St., W.
Etobicoke, ON. M9B 1K7

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____ Congregation _____

Please find enclosed a cheque for:	\$20 individual	\$10 student
	\$30 couple	\$15 student couple

for the 1997 membership plus a donation of \$ _____ I/We have read and agree with the purpose statement and doctrinal basis of the Fellowship found on the inside back cover. (*Channels* is included in the membership dues.)

or Please find enclosed a cheque for \$12 (in Canada), \$20 (in USA), or \$22 (elsewhere) for a one-year subscription (including postage).

To Pastors: Would you like *Channels* in bulk for the members of your congregation? Is so, how many?

_____ (2-20 copies - \$2.00 each, over 20 copies - \$1.50 each).

a session, and what ways those problems might be addressed. Chapters 4 and 5 look at ways of building the session into a team and how to improve communication, decision-making and the implementation of session actions. There are discussion questions for each chapter at the end of the book.

Caring for Gods People is a nine-chapter handbook designed to help elders become pastoral care-givers in their districts. Again the book opens with a solid theological exploration of what the church is to be doing, and what are some biblical models of care. "Getting Started" and "Learning to Care" (chapters 2 and 3) outline the basic tools necessary to build caring relationships with people. Chapter 4 gives very helpful ideas about how and when to use prayer in elders visits. Chapter 5 outlines some of the difficult pastoral situations any elder might face in their district, giving very helpful suggestions. "Taking care of Yourself" and "Caring for Each Other as Elders" are worth the price of the book, as they give elders the tools to do some self-care, and to be open with their fel-

low elders about what is happening in their personal lives. At the conclusion of each chapter there are discussion questions.

I have used both of these books as guides in the education section of session meetings. By assigning a chapter per meeting, I found we could work through one of the handbooks in a year (8 or 9 meetings) taking about half an hour at a regular session meeting to talk about the assigned chapter. These resources could also be used in a retreat setting with a session. I cannot recommend these books highly enough - by coming from a clearly Presbyterian perspective they have immediate resonance in our congregations, and they meet a desperate need in our church for solid eldership development resources. Whether people have been elders for 25 years or only 25 minutes, they can benefit from these handbooks.

Peter Bush

Peter Bush is the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church in Mitchell, Ontario.

Please help us by filling out the form on the bottom of page 19 and returning it to us. We desire your support through membership in the Renewal Fellowship and in prayer, and we will endeavour to encourage you by communicating the spread of renewal within the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

THE RENEWAL FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

AN INVITATION ...

OUR CONCERNS

We are praying for:

- fervent intercession for the Lord to renew his church for authentic witness and consistent obedience.
- fresh power and authority for the local congregation through the breath of God in our structures and organizations.
- responsible participation in the courts of the church.
- a deep hunger for the teaching of the Bible and its authority.
- a recall to lives of biblical purity, especially on the part of those entrusted with leadership of the people of God.
- a zeal for reaching, through the instrumentality of a national church with a rich heritage, those lost without God and without hope in the world.
- fellowship for believers to give encouragement to continued witness and ministry within the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

OUR PURPOSE

We have four specific objectives:

- We see the Renewal Fellowship as a means of contact and encouragement among those concerned for renewal within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It gives us an opportunity to relate to each other and discuss the issues from time to time arising within our denomination, mutually encouraging and strengthening one another.
- We will promote publications and other materials that clarify, especially for lay people, the concerns we share, providing biblical and theological comment, and encourage practical and specific ideas. This includes the editing, preparation

and circulation of *Channels*.

- We will encourage the development of programmes in the areas of prayer, intercession, small groups and evangelism. These programmes will be supportive, constructive, and positive.
- We will organize conferences, seminars, and other activities which will facilitate the long-term process of strengthening the Reformed and Evangelical witness within our denomination.

OUR MEMBERS

Membership in the Renewal Fellowship is open to all members and adherents of the Presbyterian Church in Canada who agree with our purpose and doctrinal basis.

In order to encourage as many as possible to become full members of the Fellowship, the annual membership fee has been set at a low \$20 (single) or \$30 (couple) and lower for students. Of course, if you are able to give more, we invite your donations.

The membership of the Renewal Fellowship elects the Board of Directors. The Board is responsible for the business of the Fellowship.

The members also chose a Council of Reference made up of members chosen for their wisdom, judgement, maturity, or expertise. The Council advises the Board of Directors.

The members of the Board and Council must be communicant members in good standing of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

OUR DOCTRINAL BASIS

We are in full agreement with the Faith confessed by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the subordinate standards of the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in 1875 and 1889, and in the Declaration Concerning

Church and Nation of 1954, as well as with the standards and subscription for membership and leadership within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In re-affirming these convictions, we wish to underline the following emphases of our biblical, evangelical and reformed faith:

- (a) The unity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
- (b) The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgement.
- (c) The divine inspiration and entire trustworthiness of Holy Scripture, as originally given and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- (d) The universal sinfulness and guilt of all men since the fall, rendering them subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
- (e) Redemption from the guilt, dominion and pollution of sin, solely through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.
- (f) The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father.
- (g) The presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration.
- (h) The justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith alone.
- (i) The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.
- (j) The one Holy Universal Church which is the Body of Christ and to which all believers belong.
- (k) The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.