



Northern Lights

Learning from Jonah

By John Kapteyn

“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.”

—Jonah 2:8, NIV

“On Yom Kippur—the holiest day of the Jewish year—Jews around the world gather in order to pray for their own lives and for their beloved, for personal atonement and for forgiveness of the sins they have committed throughout the year, and while so many Jews delve into their conscience and make amends and quiet commitments to themselves and their family, the Book of Jonah is read out—telling us of a very different sort of sin that the Jewish people must atone for.”

—Avrum Ehrlich, “The Book of Jonah and Escaping Hebrew Destiny”

According to Ehrlich, after Jonah’s running away from God and God’s call to go to Nineveh, and after Jonah ends up in the belly of a whale, he realizes that there is no escaping the will of God. In a more direct Hebrew translation of Jonah 2:8, he says, “Those who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare.”

John Kapteyn is executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada.

The story of Jonah is the story of the people of Israel, who enjoyed the privileges of being God’s chosen people but rejected the responsibility of being a light to the nations. Their greatest sin was not to live out their calling, that they were blessed to be a blessing to others. They were more concerned about themselves than about the welfare of those to whom God called them to reach out.

Could the story of Jonah and the story of the nation of Israel in the Old

Testament also be our story? Have we been so concerned about building up our church and our material security that we lose sight of being God’s people sent out in mission?

As the church seems to be in decline in many places, we need to ask if we have forsaken our own welfare because we have clung to the church as an institution, to the traditions of the church, or to the idea that the church exists for us. Have we made a “worthless idol” of the very church God instituted to be an instrument of his grace to a hungry and hurting world? ●

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Pastor Profile:

Bram Blaak

By Liz Groen

Bram Blaak is pastor of Bethel Reformed Church in Brantford, Ontario, where he's served for the past eight years.

Blaak says he always knew he would have a career in ministry. "I grew up in the CRC, and my minister, Gerard Bouma, put the itch into me—he said there was no greater calling in the universe than ministry. And my family will tell you I was always preaching!"

In the Netherlands, where Blaak was born, his family owned a clothing store. Blaak remembers standing in front of the three-way mirror near the dressing rooms and reciting sermons to his brother and sister. "It was just in me forever. It's always been a calling.

"My favorite part of ministry is



either visiting or being where everybody else is—gathering in worship, the fellowship hour afterward."

Blaak's wife, Linda, grew up in Zeeland, Michigan, and she now enjoys a job in daycare. Bram and Linda have four children: Jennifer, who has a son, Daniel; Brian, who serves in the military; Jon, a jazz drummer who is currently attending Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario; and Sara, who studied culinary arts and now works for Tim Hortons.

Reading and writing are two of Blaak's biggest hobbies; he also enjoys taking walks. He and Linda love to go on dates, although, Blaak says, "That doesn't happen as often as we'd like!"

This past summer, the General Synod appointed Blaak to serve on the board of trustees for Western Theological Seminary. He's looking forward to the experience. "We just had our first meeting, so I know I'm really going to like it," he says.

Blaak has also served as the stated clerk of the Classis of Ontario since its organization. Before accepting the call to Bethel, he served churches in Exeter and Stoney Creek, Ontario, and Norwalk, California.

News

Peter Burrill has accepted a call to minister at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario.

Bart Keefer is contracted to minister at Ebenezer Reformed Church in Stoney Creek, Ontario, till June 30, 2011.

If you wish to receive email updates from our social justice representatives, Louise MacRae and Debbie Van Hoeve, please send a request to justice@reformed-church.com.

Experiencing Mission Firsthand

By Steve Wilkinson

Woodgrove Christian Community Church recently sent a mission team to Mount Vernon, Washington.

Pastor Steve Wilkinson says, “Compassion and concern for the poor has always been an essential part of the living faith. It opens up a completely different perspective on grace and mercy, and churches that take this seriously tend to enjoy real spiritual health.”

In Woodgrove’s online newsletter, *Beacon*, Steve shares a perspective on the mission work from team member Jan Butterfield:

What on earth possessed me to go on a mission? I’m thinking there was nothing “earthly” about it at all! I’d been half-heartedly looking for a way to pay back my community for all the good things I have experienced over the years, but just haven’t been able to focus in on what to do. So when Suzanne stood up in church and said, “I’m goin’, and if anyone wants to come, they’re welcome,” I just thought, why not? This would be a good way for me to get my feet wet and maybe I’ll be inspired enough to find my niche in the volunteer jungle.

Well! Not only did I get my feet wet, but I was totally immersed for a few hours each day in a world so foreign to me that I could have been

Steve Wilkinson is pastor at Woodgrove Christian Community Church in Lantzville, British Columbia.

on another planet! Who knew that these little children could be picking the very berries that we buy in the grocery stores? I will never eat another berry without wondering—Who picked it? Was it hot that day? Did they have any lunch? Did they have a long day because all the berries ripened at once? Did those children see any of the money they earned? Did mom and dad spend the money wisely or did it go to alcohol or the ice cream man? Did they have a chance to play today? Did they get a smile or a hug from someone? Did they have a shower and put on some clean clothes?

Of course I will never know the answers to my questions, but I can pray that something happened to bring some joy to their day, like maybe a group from a church came to play with them and tell them stories about Jesus and have fun with crafts and give them snacks and big smiles!

Going on a mission is joyful and sorrowful, uplifting and depressing, and most of all exhausting. But when I picture those big smiles on those little faces, I can’t help but smile to myself and think, when on earth is the next mission?





Renewing Momentum:

Living with Purpose in Midlife and Beyond

By Holly Schut



Renewing Momentum, a ministry designed specifically with the Boomer generation in mind, has as its goal the motivating and mobilizing of this influential generation for greater impact on their congregations, communities, and God's world. Thom Rainer, in an article concerned with five future trends in the church, names two trends that relate to this ministry:

- The need to recapture and engage the Boomer generation in meaningful ways.
- The need to look at "senior" ministries in a new way.

The old models of ministry to those 65-plus will not work with the Boomer generation.

In a process guided by the Spirit and the Scriptures,

Holly Schut has served RCA churches for over 20 years in education and spiritual formation. She currently attends Arbutus Grove Church (RCA) in Parksville, British Columbia.

Renewing Momentum seeks to help people in midlife and beyond live into their "sweet spot," that place where their gifts, personalities, passions, and calling come together, enabling them to become all that God has created and called them to be.

The process leads to the writing of a personal mission and vision statement for "second adulthood," those years of 50 and beyond. As people discover their passions, it's believed the hungry will be fed, the homeless sheltered, and the lost found—and the kingdom will grow.

Renewing Momentum was launched by Holly Schut in 2008. Since then she has led retreats, seminars, and formation groups in the U.S., Australia, and Canada. Based for the next year in Parksville, British Columbia, she is excited about working with the Synod of Canada for the revitalization of individuals and congregations. Holly can be contacted at hollyschutlois@gmail.com or (250) 586-3322. ●

Mobilizing for Mission

Mobilizing for Mission contributions to date are \$188,400.

We thank you for your financial support. If you have not contributed to MFM, we ask you to prayerfully consider making a gift at this time.