

The Herald

· OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF SRI LANKA ·



Have You Heard The News?



“THOSE WHO HAVE EARS” - SEE INSIDE
ALSO INSIDE - CONNECTING THE GENERATIONS

Breaking News For A Broken World !



A Pastor speaking to the congregation one Sunday morning mentioned that he had both good news and bad news ! The bad news had to do with the fact that a severe storm had blown a hole in the roof of the building and much of the Choir area had been filled with water. The congregation responded with a concerned murmur.

Then he went on to give the good news stating that they had all the necessary funds to do the needed repairs. The congregation brightened and there were even smiles all around.

However the Pastor added, the bad news is that all that money is in your pockets ! The congregation responded with nervous laughter! Stories like that bring out much laughter but they also remind us that often life is like that too. Good news and bad news descend upon us sometimes too close to each other for our liking! Christmas time is no exception !

The theme for this Quarterly issue of the Herald is entitled "Have you heard the news?" It concerns the breaking news for a broken world delivered by an Angel to the Shepherds that first Christmas.

We are again caught up with bustle and rush of what is known as "the Christmas season." And sadly people have such a different understanding of what the Christmas event means. Some suggest that it is the season that should appeal to the better side of our nature. The time when we turn to family and friends, when we try to remember the need to be kind to the less fortunate, to be more loving and generous toward our fellow men. To such folk it is not about commercialism and sales, it is about love and family, peace on earth and being nice to those around! To others of course, it is about buying, selling and getting. It has nothing to do with religion except the religion of materialism, the worship of money and things!

So have we heard the news ? The news that really matters and is the fundamental reason for the Christmas season.

The real meaning of Christmas can be learned from the words of the Angel to the Shepherds of Bethlehem, ..."Be not afraid, I am bringing you good news of great joy." The news was so good that all the hosts of heaven appeared suddenly in the night skies of Bethlehem, making them blaze with light and ring with praise.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial	2
Meditation	4
Those who have ears	5
Youth Page	8
Children's Page	11
Family Page.....	14
Church News	16
Reformed and Always Reforming	18

The Jews in the day of Jesus were looking for a deliverer who would bring them political deliverance from the domination of Rome. They wanted an earthly Messiah. But Mary's Son was given the name Jesus, in the words of the angel, as "he will save his people from their sins." This is the bottom line of the good news of great joy!

Imagine how it must have come as good news to hear the announcement that there was only one name in all of heaven, it was necessary to know. That really was the gospel. The good news! In our day I think the challenge is different. It seems that most people don't believe there are any roadblocks on the way to heaven – they tend to think that there aren't any at all. The commonest belief is that everybody will be saved by calling on any name they choose. So we need to proclaim the good news of great joy as never before. Jesus is the Saviour and the only one. He is Immanuel and the only way to know the living God is to know him.

Have we heard this breaking news? I guess many of us have and have believed. Then let us continue to adore Him and spread this news around – A Saviour has been born for us and when we believe in Him, it can be Christmas everyday !!



By Anu Mack

HAVE YOU HEARD THE NEWS?

What does 'news' mean to you? News is typically about recent events or updates, providing the latest information on topics of interest. Social media is a platform that amplifies personal stories and rumours. Informal conversations among friends and family often include gossip.

When someone asks - 'What's news?' Do you really think that they need an update on current affairs? NO..... then what? Humans have an inherent curiosity about others' lives. Gossip satisfies this need by providing intriguing insights into personal dramas, successes, and failures, and making it a form of entertainment. If the impact works positively, it can strengthen social ties, but the negative impact can lead to conflict, hurt or damaged reputations.

News can either make you or break you.

Have you recently heard news that impacted you? Was it good? bad? shocking? mocking? or confusing? and Who was the messenger?

You have a few challenges in discerning reliable information from misinformation. It is important to understand how to navigate both positive and negative news. It can lead to anxiety, stress, and despair. Facing the impact of news, whether it's uplifting or distressing, requires a thoughtful approach.

How do we find the 'thoughtful approach'? The world may direct us to many avenues. But the good news of great joy revealed to us 2000 years ago, will pave the way for us to find the appropriate answers. Question is, if we have heard the news right?

The Angels' role as messenger delivered the joyful news of Christ being born. It reminds us that God is not distant but present and relatable. Jesus' birth is truly a gift of love from God to humanity. It represents God's desire for a personal relationship with us, inviting to draw closer.

If we have not yet heard the news 'right', let us try to find a deeper meaning to our faith, approach or thoughts during this season. Let's not be deceived by only following rituals and traditions in the religious setup. Instead, understand the good news and have a right relationship with God. This will help us not only to handle discouraging news but to spread news that will positively influence our lives and the lives of others.

This encourages us to bring our worries to God, reminding us that we can find peace even amidst distressing news. Let's be channels of sharing good news to uplift and inspire communities especially in times when bad news may overshadow joy.

Philippians 4:6-7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Shine brightly and share positivity ! And hope you heard the news right!

(Anu, is an Organist of the CRC Dehiwela and directs the Choir; and is The Head of Administration of Ladies College, Colombo, Anu is also a lay preacher of the Methodist Church.)

“THOSE WHO HAVE EARS ...”

by The Revd: Stanley Nelson

Artificial, Natural and Supernatural: Sophisticated data processing techniques of Artificial Intelligence are ceaselessly transforming how we perceive and interact with the world around us. While AI presenters are seen on TV screens, reading news, many are unaware that sometimes we interact with virtual assistants and chatbots empowered to resemble human beings and engage users through lifelike conversations. If AI-powered audio synthesis techniques enable the production of realistic and natural soundscapes, it is not a surprise. Regardless of all these revolutions, just as artificial intelligence cannot replace the natural human voice, the natural cannot take the place of the supernatural divine voice.

Speechless, Wordless and Soundless News: So, with the chirping birds in the trees, the whistling of the wind through the rustling leaves of the dancing branches, and the seasonal sputtering of raindrops, as they hit the ground, if we can hear them, we are able to use our God-given gift, called ears. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands... They have no speech; they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” For someone to hear and appreciate this speechless, wordless and soundless news one requires spiritually sensitive ears.



We Destroy the Acoustic Ecology: The embellishment caused by sinful human activities distorts the news communicated by the Creator through His nature, resulting in a rapidly shrinking soundscape. Today we continue to damage with our anthropogenic influence, we cause severe degradation of the acoustic environment, further worsening the condition of the acoustic ecology. While the sickening noise pollution has become a matter of concern, the ceaseless mixture of many noises causes numbness in hearing. We are becoming insensitive to those noises because they have become familiar and part of our lives. However, our inability to differentiate important news from noises, sometimes can leave us unprepared and prevent responding appropriately in a given situation. Similarly insensitive spiritual ears can endanger our spiritual well-being.

Many Forms, Many Times and Various Ways: However, we are blessed to have a God who keeps reaching out with His Good News in ways human beings can hear. The author of the letter to the Hebrews is overwhelmed by the acts of God Who in the past, spoke to our forefathers through many forms at many times and in various ways finally, He has spoken to us through His Son. Since He is only beloved Son of God the apostles were commanded to listen while they were on the Mount of Transfiguration. When God spoke to the fallen man he sought to hide in the garden. At Mount Sinai, the trembling

Israelites requested Moses speak to them and did not want God directly speaking to them. This necessitated a mediator between the God of holiness and the Man of sinfulness.

Audible, Visible and Touchable News: Our heavenly Father was so pleased to have all His fullness dwell in His Son Jesus and to send Him in human form to make His dwelling among us. This amazing news is shared by the beloved disciple of Jesus, in one of his letters, saying, we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched. The enticing visual culture of the contemporary world combined with AI technology engages our senses and enhances our hearing not only with our ears but also with our eyes and hands. But the supreme and irreplaceable God's news comes to us in the unique form of His one and only Son is also audible, visible and touchable. Therefore, the Good News proclaimed concerning Him needs to be heard, seen and felt.



Call to Repent and to be Reformed: When Jesus called His hearers, "Those who have ears, let him hear," He was talking about using something more than the two organs that are on each side of the head to receive sounds. The Lord Jesus calls His followers to act on what He says to them, rather than just hear His word. Those who hear are expected not only to listen with their ears but also to take what is heard to heart, changing attitudes, thinking, and feeling resulting in a change of behaviours or a total transformation of life. True hearing brings about the fruits of repentance, produced by understanding leading to reformation. It seeks to study the word of God to apply it to one's life rather than just acquiring knowledge. The most challenging part is the obedience in action where the resistance sets in.

Refusal to Hear: Herod and all of Jerusalem were disturbed when the news was heard about the birth of a king of the Jews. Herod feared and felt that his position as king was under threat. So, he sought to kill baby Jesus, resulting in the Messiah taking refuge in Egypt. The Jewish chief priests and teachers of the law were aware of the news. Sadly, they refused to hear the good news and continued to resist. They condemned Him to death and handed Him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged and crucified. They used the man-made traditions that have been handed down to nullify the word of God. They did many things like that when the word of God challenged their positions, practices, and privileges. Pretending to be zealous, they were quick to hold the traditions of their forefathers over and above the word of God to escape its authority. Those who heard the sermon by Stephen the first Christian martyr were such people who closed their ears and cast stones at him.

The Problem of Itchy Ears: The appetite of our flesh is prone to be selective in our hearing which may make us deaf to the voice of God. Apostle Paul warns about this bitter truth about the last days when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to satisfy their own lusts, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what

their itching ears want to hear. They are manipulators who misinterpret the Scripture and bring news that is neither good nor true. Many of them are aimed at entertaining the itchy ears leading to deception. Another form of selective hearing is deeply deceptive which seeks and aims at finding fault rather than learning to obey.



The Earbuds and Headphones: When someone becomes deaf by

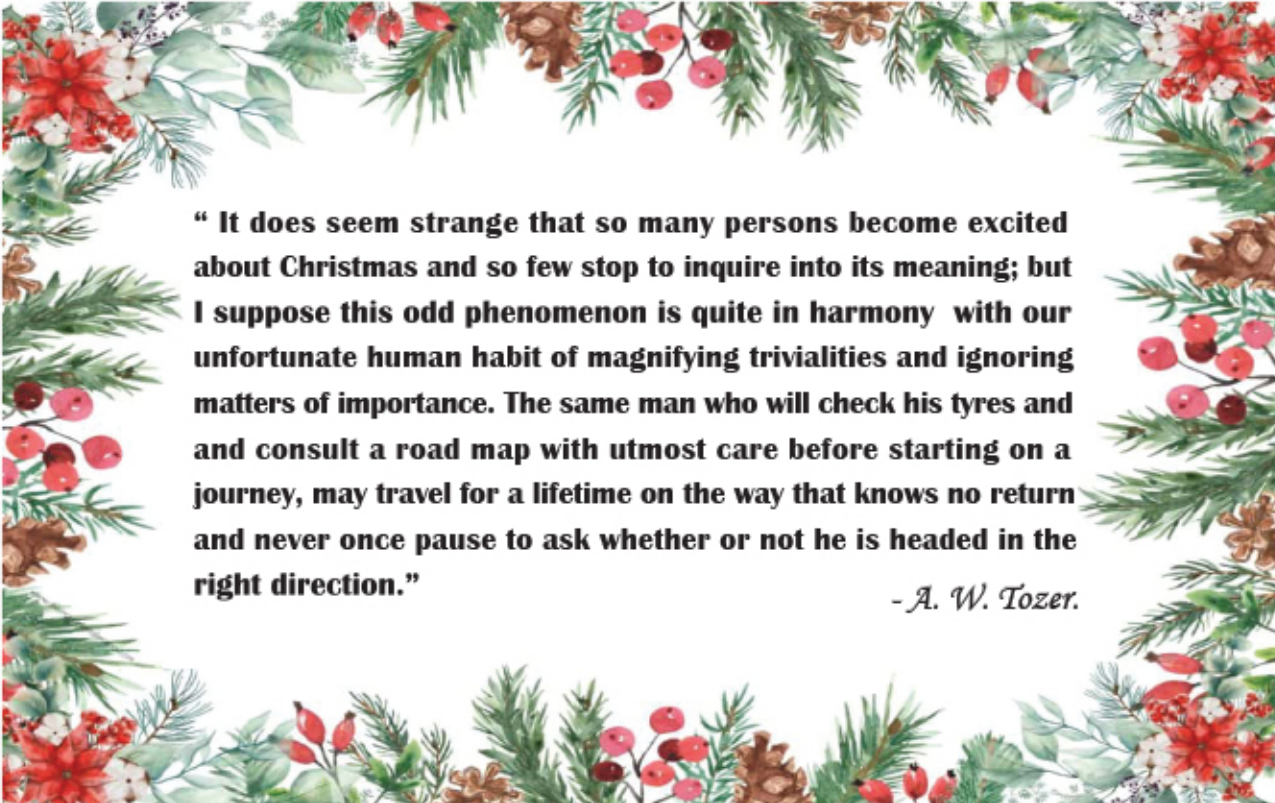


choice or decides not to hear God, that person will not be able to hear what God wants him or her to hear. One's earbuds and headphones may aid private listening to serve individual preferences while avoiding disturbances to the public. However, the individualistic culture and the resultant insensitivity to the surroundings isolate one from the other to live in one's own world not caring for the world around. They isolate people from each other preventing interaction

within their family members. We are growing deaf and becoming unable to hear the cries of the members of our family and neighbourhood.

Hearing with Eyes, Hands and Hearts: Hearing is a gift of God, when it is turned to God's news, it becomes a blessing. Faith is a product of hearing, as one's belief system is formulated by what he or she constantly hears. When the word of God is heard, it produces faith in God. By sending His word in the flesh, God engages all senses with which we can hear Him not only by ears but also with eyes, hands, and even with our hearts. It calls us to share the Good News in words to hear and deeds that people can see and touch in visual and tactile culture.

(Revd: Nelson is a former President of the CRC SL and presently pastors the Dehiwela and Kohuwela Tamil Language congregations.)



“ It does seem strange that so many persons become excited about Christmas and so few stop to inquire into its meaning; but I suppose this odd phenomenon is quite in harmony with our unfortunate human habit of magnifying trivialities and ignoring matters of importance. The same man who will check his tyres and consult a road map with utmost care before starting on a journey, may travel for a lifetime on the way that knows no return and never once pause to ask whether or not he is headed in the right direction.”

- A. W. Tozer.

The Good News of Great Joy: A Message to Remember

Imagine this:

It's a quiet night, and a group of shepherds are out in the fields, taking care of their sheep. For them, it's just another ordinary night—watching over their flock, protecting them from any dangers. These shepherds weren't seen as super important people in society. They were just regular, hard-working people doing their job.

But suddenly, the sky lights up! An angel appears before them, shining with a glory they'd never seen before. These shepherds, who were probably used to facing wild animals, were terrified! But the angel tells them something they'd never expect to hear:

"Don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."

The angel's message wasn't just a cool announcement or some random statement. It was the best news ever:

"Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."
(Luke 2:11)

Why is this News So Great?

1. **A Savior is Born:** The angel didn't come with news about a new king taking power or a famous leader rising to the top. He came to talk about a Savior—someone sent by God to rescue us. That's Jesus! He wasn't just born to be a good person or to teach good lessons. He was born to save.
2. **Great Joy for ALL People:** This wasn't just good news for the shepherds or the people living in that area. It was good news for the whole world—for every person, no matter who they are or where they're from. This was a joy that could change lives forever!
3. **A Direct Message from God:** The fact that God chose to send His angels to shepherds in the fields is really significant. It shows that God cares about everyone, even those who might seem unimportant. God's love and message of hope aren't just for the rich, popular, or powerful. It's for the everyday, regular people like you and me.

How Does This Apply to Us Today?

When you hear the phrase "good news of great joy," what comes to your mind? A good grade on a test? Winning a game? Getting something you really wanted? Those things are exciting for sure, but they don't last forever.

The "good news" that the angel spoke of isn't temporary; it's eternal. It's about Jesus coming into the world to bring hope, forgiveness, and new life to everyone who believes in Him. When we accept this good news, we can find joy that doesn't fade away, even when life gets tough.

Why Joy Matters

Joy isn't the same as happiness. Happiness depends on what happens around us, but joy comes from knowing that God loves us, that He sent Jesus for us, and that no matter what, we're never alone.

The good news of Jesus isn't just a nice story to hear at Christmas; it's a reality that changes everything. When you face struggles, remember this: The same God who sent angels to the shepherds is the same God who cares for you today. He offers peace in the chaos, light in the darkness, and hope in the hardest times.

What Can You Do About It?

Celebrate the Good News: Take time to thank God for what He's done. Spend time in prayer, worship, or even writing down things you're grateful for.

Share the Good News: Just like the shepherds, who couldn't keep this amazing message to themselves, we're also called to share God's love with others. Think of a friend or family member who could use some hope and encouragement.

Remember the Source of Your Joy: When life gets stressful or overwhelming, remind yourself that true joy comes from knowing Jesus and the love He has for you.

Conclusion

The message of "good news of great joy" that the shepherds heard is a reminder that God's love is for everyone, and His joy is something we can experience every day. The shepherds weren't special or important in the world's eyes, but God chose them to receive the message first. And in the same way, God invites us to receive His love and share it with others.

So, as you go through your day, remember: The good news that changed the shepherds' lives can change yours too. Embrace it, live it, and let it bring you joy that overflows!

Youth Page

Edited By: Joshua Aldons


Dig Deeper

Just like the shepherds, who couldn't keep the amazing news of the birth of Jesus to themselves, we're also called to share God's love & Good News with others. Think of a friend or family member who could use some hope and encouragement. Maybe pay them a visit or call them over the phone.



Just For Laughs

Why did the shepherd get promoted?

He was outstanding in his field!


What do shepherds sing at Christmas?

"Fleece Navidad!"

What did the shepherd say after seeing the angel?

"Well, that was un-ewe-sual!"



A pastor was preaching to a group of children n day & explained that sheep and needed lots of guidance, and that a shepherd's job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off. He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance.

Then the pastor put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children, "If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?" He was pretty obviously indicating himself.

A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young boy said, " Jesus, Jesus is the shepherd."

The young priest, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, "Well, if Jesus is the shepherd, then, who am I?"

The little boy frowned thoughtfully and then said with a shrug, "I guess you must be the sheep dog."



Children's Page

Edited by Amanda Fraser.



Hi Boys and Girls,

Have you ever read a newspaper? Do you know what you usually see in a newspaper?

Newspapers give us news about events from all over the Country and even the world!

Sometimes they give bad news and sometimes they give good news. Back when Jesus was born, there weren't really any newspapers, so people spread the news by talking and telling others about special events that took place.

When baby Jesus was born the angels wanted to spread the good news... but how?

Shepherds! The angels appeared to shepherds in the middle of the night and told them about baby Jesus. The shepherds were so excited they ran off to spread the word that God had sent a special saviour to save the world!

It's hard to keep good news to yourself huh? We just want to share it! Well that's exactly what God wants us to do!

He wants us to go out there and spread the good news that Jesus is a Saviour for us all. Whether we are shepherds or kids , He loves us all and wants to be our friend.

I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and don't forget to share the good news about Jesus!

Lots of love,
Aunty Mandy





A BAA-Mazing night in Bethlehem



On a quiet night in Bethlehem, I was just getting cozy, curled up next to my favorite clump of grass, when suddenly... BAM! The whole sky lit up like a bazillion fireflies! My friends and I jumped up, bleating in surprise. I may or may not have let out a very undignified "BAAA!"

"Hey! What's going on?!" I asked my friend Wooly, who was shaking in her fleece. All of a sudden, these huge, shiny creatures appeared above us—angels, they called themselves. Now, usually, shepherds don't notice much, but this time, they looked just as shocked as us sheep. Ben, our shepherd, even dropped his staff and nearly fell into our water bucket!

Then one of the angels said, "Don't be afraid!" which seemed silly because, hello, if you don't want to scare sheep, maybe don't light up the entire sky! But we settled down, especially when we heard what they had to say: a special baby was born tonight, and they called him Jesus! The angel said he would bring joy to the

world. Now, I didn't know what that meant exactly, but joy sounded like a good thing!

Then Ben, ever the practical one, asked, "Uh... does this baby need a babysitter?" which made all the shepherds and even the angels laugh.

But just as the angels left, a bright, twinkling star lit up right over Bethlehem. Our shepherds decided to follow it to find this baby, and naturally, we sheep tagged along. I mean, who wouldn't want to meet someone bringing "joy to the world"?

We arrived at a cozy little stable, and there he was this little baby, looking up at us all with big, curious eyes, and let me tell you, I'd never felt anything like it. Warm, peaceful, and, yep, joy. The best feeling ever.

So, there you have it: the night some very surprised sheep stumbled into the best news of all time! BAA-mazing, right?



HOLY NIGHT

CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH



Connecting the Generations

by Marsha Navamanie

Christmas is upon us. It is a time of celebration with family and friends. It is a good time to pass on traditions that you remember from your childhood to your children and grandchildren. It is easy to get caught up in the activities and miss the true value or meaning of the season. As grandparents you can have an impact on how those traditions are passed on to your grandchildren. For years we have been recommending various activities which will help our children understand the true meaning of Christmas (Advent calendars, wreaths, carol services, etc). You should start by thinking about what were the most meaningful things as you were growing up. Was it a particular service you attended, maybe the Sunday School Christmas party, carols on the radio, decorating the tree, or making Christmas Cake with your mother and grandmother? Then begin early to think about how you can bring the meaning of those traditions down to your grandkids.

I know children today are very busy with many activities, but Christmas should be a time to slow down and spend time together with the different generations.

The first place we need to meet is at the dinner table. We need to eat together. Make sure these meals leave time for sharing stories, making connections with each other and opening doors to understanding each other. Share what Christmas was like for you, what memories were most important in your development. Tell it in a way that makes it exciting for your grandkids. I'm sure you have some great stories, about curfews, Christmases without presents, etc. Think about what the conversation might be about beforehand



in order to make it interesting for all the ages. One grandfather wrote thought-provoking questions on cards to have at the table and the group would choose which to discuss.

Incorporate all ages into the preparation of the food. This is a chance to teach family recipe secrets to the next generation. Involve everyone in the clean up as well. It is a great time to share stories from your life. A great Christmas present to your children or grandchildren would be to write a cookbook with your family recipes in it to give to each family.

Children love arts and crafts. Think of a project you can do together, maybe something you remember as a kid, or some new project. My mother always had a Christmas craft for us to do each December when we were kids. We would make a felt wall hanging, or paint wooden ornaments for the tree. I still have many of these projects that I drag out every Christmas and display around my home. After the big meal, when a lot of the adults want to have a nap, you can entertain the young ones with some meaningful craft project. Incorporate the Christmas story if you can.

In my house, after dinner we staged the Christmas story using the young ones as Mary and Joseph and perhaps a donkey. One of the older children would read the story from Luke 2. Maybe there will be a baby available. If not, a doll will work fine for Baby Jesus. My mother always had an empty manger under the Christmas tree until Christmas Eve, when she put my doll in it.

As I was growing up, Christmas Eve was the big celebration when both sides of the family got together and we had all the traditional foods of our culture. Both sets of grandparents were there as well as my cousins. We were fortunate not to have too big a family, although my parents were

always thoughtful to include people who did not have their own families, refugees, and others who were alone on Christmas. I remember serving up to 30 people at some Christmas Eve meals. After dinner we read the Christmas story and opened presents. Later we went to the late service at church, ours started at 11:00 pm.

The making of the Christmas Cake is a big event for many Sri Lankan families. It is a great opportunity to connect the generations. There is a lot of cutting, chopping and mixing involved, so get as many as possible involved in the process. There are also many teaching opportunities in the Christmas cake. We use a recipe, just like the Bible is our recipe book for life. Some things, like ginger are bitter, but when added to the cake make it taste good. Many bitter things happen in our lives, but God's overall plan for us is for our good. There are many opportunities like this. Take some of the cake and decorate it to be a birthday cake for Jesus, let the children sing Happy Birthday to Jesus and blow out the candles. It is a good reminder that it is Jesus birthday, not theirs.



On a special day, some time before Christmas, make cookies with your grandkids. This is another opportunity to share recipes, tricks you use, and gives many opportunities to share lessons about faith, life and about your childhood.



Edith Schaeffer explains why all this is important in her book, **Christianity is Jewish**.

*There was meant to be not just an outward observance of some "religious rites" but as generations went on, people were meant to discuss, talk about, explain, give understanding, to their children and their children's children all that they had been told, and all that they had experienced... Children are meant to be considered important, significant human beings, made in the image of God. They are meant to be communicated with, in great sections of time when parents are walking with them, sitting with them, eating with them, and continually discussing, answering questions, being interested.*¹

Maybe your grandchildren are not living close by during the holidays. Then you will need to think about ways you can be involved with them from a distance. Send them Christmas cards, or a box of cookies or some of your cake, with a handwritten note about what Christmas means to you. Talk to them on your phone or computer and see if there is any way you can participate online with what is happening in their world, maybe a Christmas program they are in. We are so lucky today to have that available to us. Let's make sure we take advantage of any way we can encourage them in their faith.

So, I hope you will carve out the time to think about ways you can make this season meaningful to your children and grandchildren, and remember that **Jesus is the reason for the season**.

Material based on the book:

Faithful Grandparenting, Practical Ideas for Connecting the Generations, by Becky Danielson and Carol Olsen, Equip Press.

¹ Edith Schaeffer, *Christianity is Jewish*, (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale, 1975) p. 60.

Marsha Navamanie and her husband Ron have been working with the CRC SL in Sri Lanka for the past 23 years. They recently returned to the U.S.A.

+++ CHURCH NEWS+++



❖ **Tri Lingual Thanksgiving Service.**

A Trilingual Service to give God thanks for the 382nd anniversary of the CRC SL was held at the CRC Bambalapitiya on Saturday 5th October, 2024 at 5.00 pm, with a focus on Prayer. The traditional date of the founding of the CRCSL goes back to the 6th of October, 1642. A time of Praise and Worship, Congregational Intercessory prayer for the growth of the congregations and a group prayer time involving the respective Local Consistory were all part of the Order of Service.

The Sermon was preached by the CRCSL President, Pastor Lakmal Wijeratne on the theme, "The Effect of Prayer on Church Growth." Many of the other CRC SL Pastors gave leadership to the different segments in the liturgy. A time of fellowship over light refreshments followed in the Parish Hall. A representative gathering of the CRCSL congregations from within Colombo were present.

❖ **Reformation Sunday.**

On Sunday the 27th of October, the worship services in the local Churches focussed on the Reformation. The 31st of October, 2024 was the 507th anniversary of the Reformation going back to the 31st of October, 1517, the traditional date on which Martin Luther nailed his 95 sentences on the Church door in Wittenberg, calling the Church of that age back to the Bible. The prayers, hymns and sermons focussed on the fundamentals truths of the Reformation. The CRCSL for 382 years has been part of this Reformed heritage.

❖ **Little Lambs Montessori.**

The Little Lambs Montessori of the CRC Dehiwela, was recognized amongst the Ten best

Montessori's of the Colombo District by the Pre School Section of the Education Department. Founded on the 16th of January, 1985, as part of the vision of serving the Community by the then Pastor, Revd: Crosbie de Kretser, the Montessori continues this service, through many a challenge. We do thank God for this recognition and congratulate the Staff and the Board of Management.

❖ **Children's Fun Day,**

To commemorate Children's day, the Dehiwela Sunday School organised an elaborate "Fun day" for the Children of the Sunday School on Thursday 17th of October, which was a public holiday. Many indoor and outdoor games, which included an inflatable bouncer, a Magic show, tasty food and drink and were all part of the evening.

In addition the good work of the Teachers were also recognition with Plaques of Appreciation being presented to all. The Sunday School Superintendents, the Teachers, together with the LC representative on the Sunday School, Lasitha Wijeratne and his wife Nilu, were responsible for the intricate and creative planning and implementation that gave the kids a time of their lives.

❖ **Ceylon Bible Society Sale.**

The Annual Sale and Good News Fair of the Ceylon Bible Society took place on Saturday the 26th of October at the premises of the CRC Wellawatte. A variety of Stalls, which included books, household items, food and the CRC SL Games stall, were the feature of the day. The CRC SL also supports the Bible Ministry through donations received from the Local Churches, with "Collection Lists" being circulated.

❖ **Kohuwela Congregation Day Out**

The Kohuwela English language congregation organised a day out at Subodhi Institute, Piliyandala, on the 17th October, 2024. It was a joyous time for old – the small, young and elderly, ranging from 5 to 80 years !The day began with prayer offered by Pastor Lakmal,

followed by a time of chorus singing with actions, games that all could be part of and a time to relax and enjoy each others company.

The day's program ended with the young and not so young involved in a game of Cricket. We are thankful that this day helped to sustain the "family" spirit, the fellowship and oneness of the Kohuwela congregation. (contributed by Nilanee Tissaratchy.)

❖ **Church Register**

❖ **Baptisms**

"For the promise is unto you and to your children..."

Tyler Mesach, son of Marlon and Tamasha Jansz, at the CRC Dehiwela on Sunday 27th October, 2024.

Jordan Michael, son of Shannon and Rochelle Lindsay, at the CRC Regent-Street on Sunday 3rd November, 2024.

❖ **Adult Baptism.**

"As you have received Christ, so walk..."

Srimathi Mangalika Passe, at the CRC Regent-Street on Sunday 3rd November, 2024.

❖ **Admission to Membership.**

"Now you are the body of Christ..."

Shannon Michael Lindsay.
Rochelle Andrea Lindsay.
Sebastian Micah Lindsay.
Lucas Mason Lindsay.

Jude Heshan Soysa.

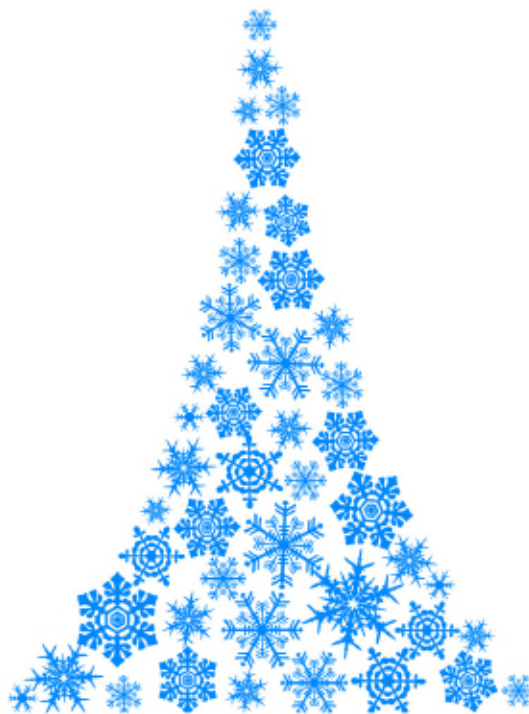
On Sunday 3rd November, 2024, at the CRC Regent-Street.

❖ **Death.**

"Forever with the Lord..."

Raj Jesudhason, on Tuesday 12th November, 2024, of the Dehiwela Congregation.

(The "News" in these pages is gathered from the Bulletins published by the respective local churches and available in the Church office. Any other news of events or involving the membership could be sent directly to the Editor of "The Herald," for publication according to the established criteria. – Ed.)



Reformed and Always Reforming

By Jeff Fisher

Variations of the saying “reformed and always reforming” have been expressed for centuries, with a breadth of meaning and intent. While it is often identified as a Reformation slogan, we have no written evidence that the Reformers themselves used these words together this way. They seem to have first appeared more than 150 years after Luther’s 95 Theses and more than a century after John Calvin’s death. Yet Reformed theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck did use versions of the slogan in the 19th century, and Karl Barth popularized the phrase in the 20th century. They used it to convey that Reformed Christians should continually examine their doctrine and practice to ensure its purity and faithfulness, just as Luther, Calvin, and others did in the 16th century.

However, the use of “reformed and always reforming” and its variations exploded after World War II with the purpose of justifying doctrinal change (see Busch, “Calvin and the Reformanda Sayings,” and Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*). The updated Foundations of Presbyterian Polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), for example, includes, “The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God” as the reason for its openness to reforming its doctrinal standards and governance (F-2.02). Additionally, *Reformed and Always Reforming* is the title of a book by Roger Olson, the Arminian author of *Against Calvinism*. So the slogan’s use apparently does not even need to communicate that one has to be or remain Reformed theologically. With this broad spectrum of application, what does it mean for Reformed people and churches to be “reformed and always reforming”? A brief look at the phrase’s origins and historical

context can help us understand the kind of reforming sought then and its relevance to more clearly seeing our own contexts.

Origins of the Saying

“Reformed and always reforming” first appears in a 1674 devotional by Jodocus van Lodenstein, a Reformed pastor involved with the Nadere Reformatie (Dutch Second Reformation). He expressed concern that an overemphasis on right doctrine had overshadowed attention to personal piety. From van Lodenstein’s perspective, people in the Reformed church needed not only to hold right beliefs, but to experience transformation in everyday lives and practices. He sought reform that would awaken the inner dimensions of faith—the genuine religion of the heart. His historical situation shaped the particular kind of reforming in the Reformed churches he desired.

Scholars of European history refer to the period from the late 1550s to the 1720s as the Age of Confessionalism. Near the beginning of this era, the various branches of Protestant Christianity published confessions to distinguish themselves from one another and from Roman Catholicism. This includes the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). As Protestantism spread in the 17th century, each group sought to define, defend, articulate, and clarify their beliefs even more, often resulting in the formation of further confessions, such as the Canons of Dort (1619) and the Westminster Standards (1646-47). Confessional solidification intensified, sparking numerous debates within communities.

Between the 1640s and 1720s, the heightened emphasis on right doctrine led to divisions among those interpreting the Reformed confessions

differently. During this era of “high orthodoxy,” van Lodenstein expressed that the Reformed church should always be reforming. At the same time, German Pietism emerged from within Lutheranism, sparked by Philipp Jakob Spener’s *Pia desideria* (1675), published only a year after van Lodenstein’s devotional. What Spener did for Pietism among German Lutherans van Lodenstein had already begun among the Dutch Reformed. Confessional entrenchment instigated a call to reform piety, paralleling previous Reformers calling for doctrinal reformation.

A renewed focus on piety ushered in a period of deconfessionalization, when doctrinal differences and boundaries were downplayed and minimized. Among the many significant events during this time was the revival in the 1730s and 1740s now referred to as the First Great Awakening, led most notably by John and Charles Wesley (Anglicans influenced by Pietism who started Methodism) and Calvinist theologians George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The reforming envisioned by Spener and van Lodenstein bore fruit, but the subsequent shift that prioritized emotions over intellect and the heart over the head prompted many in the next generation to advocate for a returned focus on doctrine. And so continued the oscillation between confessionalism and pietism, each emphasizing either doctrine or practice, too often at the expense of the other. I believe we are in one of these swings again, although the diversity of church experiences leads some to advocate for a return to doctrinal purity while others seek faithfulness in practice.

In addition to the historic origins of “reformed and always reforming,” its linguistic origins will help us better understand its proper use. The

earliest version—*reformata semper reformanda*—was in Latin, the shared theological language of the time. Many today who want to clarify its meaning point out that *reformanda* is a passive participle, indicating that the reforming must happen *to* a person or church and is not an action done *by* the person or church. Critics of this slogan say some churches use it to justify new ideas that seemingly go against the Reformed faith or even blend un-Christian cultural and societal influences with Christianity. They insist that true reforming can be initiated only by God. Though not exactly the same, the verbal form is similar to what is translated in 2 Corinthians 3:18 as “being transformed” into Christ’s image. This observation helpfully reminds us that any transforming or reforming only happens by God, and *semper reformanda* does not give us license to make whatever changes we think will benefit us or the church. Rather, as an individual Christian is justified and yet always in the process of sanctification, the Reformed church is reformed and yet always in the process of reformation. Both are the already-but-not-yet work of God.

“Always Reforming” in Recent History

The church being reformed and always in the process of reform remains a reality and a necessity to this day. Obviously we live in a different time and context than those who wrote the Reformed confessions. Not all of their controversies are ours, and many controversies we face today never occurred to them. Much has changed and required reforming since then. Even the term “reformed” presents challenges. Not only does it describe the many branches that came out of the Reformation, such as Presbyterians (who adhere to different confessions from ours), but it is also used by certain groups of Baptists

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today who embrace teachings related to predestination but reject the historically Reformed views on covenant and the sacraments.

The combination of our confessions and the corresponding practices of faith and life we developed locate our particular Christian Reformed branch on the much bigger tree of Christianity. But we are not immune to the broader cultural movements in society or the church, whether in the past or the present, so we regularly find ourselves in need of reforming.

At present, our denomination finds itself in a time when some calling for “reformation” want a return to ways of our past, while others seek reform that would take us on a different trajectory. What could or should “always reforming” look like for us as Reformed Christians? Reflecting on some of the many changes in our own denomination can help us identify the reforming that is continually necessary. The following characteristics exemplify thoughtful application of “always reforming” that neither holds tightly to the way things are or were nor grabs at the latest fads, gimmicks, or innovations.

» **Humility to recognize that all theology and practice is historically and culturally situated.** Not

only are our Reformed confessions historically and culturally rooted, but so are many of our liturgical and spiritual practices. In fact, so is the Bible itself. This does not make any of it untrue or wrong. But it should remind us that we need to do the necessary work of distinguishing between enduring truths and the contextual ways those truths have been implemented. Church history is filled with massive overhauls and inconspicuous adjustments to what Christians believe and how they behave. Our denomination’s position on card playing, theatergoing, dancing, and other “worldly amusements” is just one example of this. Christian Reformed members were urgently warned that these were contrary to an appropriate lived expression of the Reformed faith. Over decades, upon further reflection on Scripture and its application, reforming happened on these matters. Similarly, we revisited long-held interpretations of Scripture regarding divorce and remarriage, children at the Lord’s Supper, creation and science, and many other topics.

» **Openness to incorporate insights from other Christian traditions.** In addition to matters of practice, many theological positions have experienced reform too, especially because of interactions with Christians who have other perspectives. The Christian Reformed Church, for example, recognized that it could still be Reformed even while embracing certain views on spiritual gifts from the Pentecostals and Charismatics that we had previously believed to be wrong. Similarly, Reformed Christians have incorporated or reincorporated certain liturgical and spiritual practices in recent decades that had previously been rejected as too Catholic.

Perhaps most significantly, our revision of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession on the relationship between church and state and of Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism on the Roman Catholic Mass happened in part because of interactions with other Christians. Changes, updates, and revisions like this do not undermine or subvert what it means to be Reformed. Rather, they demonstrate a reforming posture that is open to considering and evaluating these gifts from other Christians.

» **Readiness to correct abuses and errors in the institutional church.**

This includes confessing and repenting of previous wrongdoing, not just individually but collectively. Following the stunning survey results from the early 1990s on the extent of abuse within the CRCNA, our denomination developed what is now Thrive's Safe Church Ministry to provide training and support regarding abuse awareness, prevention, and response. We rightly confessed that the CRCNA had not always addressed abuse justly, compassionately, and adequately, and we did something about it. Additionally, in our attempts to articulate and implement our position on same-sex marriage, we have repeatedly called for repentance of the way people who are LGBTQ+ have been treated. Undoubtedly our actions, even when we have good intentions, do not always live up to our beliefs. We must continually seek the Spirit's work of reforming where we have strayed.

Always Reforming Today

In the moment we find ourselves today, one could point out numerous places in society, the broader church, our denomination, our individual churches, and our own lives that are in need of reforming. Perhaps the broadest meaning for "always reforming" is

the recurring need to refocus on the mission and purposes of the church. Christians often have found themselves enamored with power, status, influence, grandeur, and privilege to the detriment of remaining grounded in worship, fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism. Presently, it seems we need a renewed engagement with God's Word, personally and communally, for theological understanding and its lived expression. I contend that, for all its positive outcomes, the influence of the Church Growth Movement's emphasis on experience, community, and success measured by attendance unfortunately contributed to deficient discipling. Both the plummeting of biblical and theological literacy and the increase of behavior inconsistent with the redemptive story of the gospel indicates the need for significant reforming. For us to remain grounded in our beliefs and open to change, we need to have meaningful, accessible training in Scripture and theology that empowers people to go deeper than what Sunday mornings can offer. Undoubtedly this will look different from evening services or Sunday School of the past, but its continued absence will perpetuate many of the problems and challenges the church faces today that require reforming among the Reformed.

The thread running through all uses of the phrase "reformed and always reforming" is the notion of change, modification, or alteration intended to make one's faith better, truer, and more living and active. It conveys the need to regularly revisit areas where we might be susceptible to de-emphasizing an important aspect of faith and to seek renewal there. It challenges the status quo, whether that is seen as capitulating too much to cultural influence or exhibiting doctrinal obstinance. The slogan evokes the tension between a return

to previous theological formulations and a renewal of faith experiences. For good reason, the apostle Paul contends, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim. 4:16). The two should not be separated or imbalanced. Like the two pedals on a bicycle, they should operate in tandem. Otherwise we lose our balance and potentially even fall.

In its best usage, "reformed and always reforming" urges constant critical reflection about whether our practices and doctrines truly reflect the gospel and the teachings of Jesus. Our Reformed doctrine teaches that all of us, individually and collectively, are contaminated by sin and its effects, but Jesus' promise to build his church gives us hope as we eagerly await his return. Until that day, reforming will always be necessary. As we follow Jesus between now and then, let us be reformed and always seeking the reforming work of the Spirit in our lives and our churches.



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TAIL LIGHTS

BY C.N.J

THE LAST DAY !



As we all perhaps know, a last day brings with it both joy and sorrow ! I remember the last day of the School term...what joy it brought – in anticipation of at least a month of fun, play and everything else! However a last day when it comes to partings of any kind, brings with it much sadness, unless of course it is a GROBR situation !! All of us have been there one way or another !

I was led to focus on this – due to a visit I had with some friends from Perth on the very last day of their stay. Since we could not make it on the day we were invited, it had to be the last few hours of the last day! Having gladly spent time with them I was ready to leave after prayer and traditional good bye's – and then they surprised me with some goodies they had brought and more goodies that they received but could not take with them ! There was some nice local sweet meats and some authentic Lamprais as well ! I assured them that, given all this, the next time they come I would make it a point to visit only on the last day!!

The Bible has so much to say about the last day ! And living in these end times, it would be good for us to take note! That day would be also a day of joy and sorrow. Joy for some. Sorrow for others.

Remember what Jesus pointedly said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." (St. John 12: 48).

This month we commemorate the first coming with the Christmas event, whilst actively awaiting the second coming which will herald the last day! The bottom line is that we must be well prepared and ready for both. The question remains – Are We ??

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