

NZ Update -- 25 May 2017

Greetings once again from Auckland. The following report was mostly written by Dennis Richards. I wrote the section about the Masterton retreat, and have attached some photos of the retreat. Many thanks to Dennis for his extensive report.

OIC Seminars and Retreat: GCI in New Zealand was honoured to host Dr Larry Hinkle and Gracie Johnson of Odyssey In Christ ministry over this past week. They arrived Monday 15 May from Australia and stayed 9 days, primarily in Wellington and Masterton in the lower North Island, and I had the privilege of driving them around while here.

While in Wellington Dr Hinkle was invited to introduce OIC to members of the congregation and give two evening presentations. These were hosted in the home of Maureen MacDonald and attended by 9 from the congregation and 2 other friends involved in prayer ministry locally. The two topics presented were "Transforming Prayer: Restoring Body, Soul, and Spirit" and "Spiritual Discernment in Leadership: Discerning the Presence of God in Group Decision Making" which were warmly received. Indeed, Louis Smith later commented in an email, "Larry's language and thought and approach is very embracing and pleasing to the ear" and that he and Gracie "have a powerful ministry transforming lives and developing leadership and spiritual transformation."



Dr Hinkle began with an overview to the what and why of OIC that circled around three passages of Scripture (John 17:3; Eph 1:17; Rev 3:20), drawing out how close is the relationship God consistently seeks with us, and how through the pathway of prayer our issues and fears may be healed, bringing our lives into balance and productivity. Indeed, he said, "In Jesus pain has somewhere to go." Along the way we were introduced to new forms of praying, one being the Safe Place Prayer. He introduced also the perspective of balancing left- and right-brained thinking so that we might live and worship God more effectively and productively. These thoughts were picked up again in the second presentation on discernment with an emphasis on our seeking God as core to our lives and the work we do. Gracie Johnson participated also in the presentations and gave a moving and refreshing testimony of her own experience of God's protection, healing and transformation that now underpin her life and worship.

Both evenings were times of warm fellowship and discussion. Despite having only just arrived from elsewhere, the conversations were full and rich, as if both Larry and Gracie were long-time friends. Aside from these two meetings there was time for a little relaxation too, sightseeing around the Wellington region and learning a little of its history and culture before moving north to Masterton on the Thursday in preparation for the Deeper Walk Retreat.



The purpose of the retreat was to outline spiritual formation practices that enhance a deeper personal relationship with God. Solitude and silence, discerning God in the creation, sacred reading of scripture, spiritual journaling, creative expression in play, keeping Sabbath, meditation and various types of prayer were some of the practices expounded.

The program included opportunities to practice the principles covered. For instance, participants were guided in spending time in silence listening to God's voice. Another exercise was to take a walk outside to concentrate on insights from the creation and report back to the entire group.

After a session on the way creative play can contribute to spiritual formation the members split into teams with 30 minutes to prepare a skit to be performed in front of the whole group. The results showed amazing spontaneous creativity and talent, making for a laughter-filled evening.

The venue was a school hall, and the Filipino ladies took over the kitchen and provided all the meals, with a seemingly endless variety of delicious food. There were around 30 attendees, including David and Marilyn Wong and Rex Morgan from Auckland, Bob and Imelda Longhurst from Hamilton, and Brian and Dagmar Barnes from Wellington. They found it to be a privilege and a delight to get to know our Filipino brethren better as well as being provided with practical tools to help us draw closer to our God.



The retreat concluded with lunch on Sunday, and was followed by the regular weekly Masterton church service, where Dr Hinkle gave a sermon on "Emotionally healthy spirituality". He highlighted a number of passages showing that God, the One who created emotions, is an emotional God. While on earth Jesus demonstrated emotions such as anger, fullness of joy, and depression to the stage that he was "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt 26:38). Made in God's image, we are emotional beings and need to ask ourselves the question "How emotionally mature am I?"

The last event for the tour was an evening Question and Answer with the leadership team and some others. This was held in the same hall between 7:30 and 9:00pm. Initially the questions turned around relational issues at work that some were experiencing and Dr Hinkle outlined approaches they might try that started with the internal transformational changes he had been teaching over the weekend and thus responding positively and humbly as Jesus had. Also covered was the miracle of their coming to this land as a move of God's Spirit for their sake and for those who are now their neighbours. Their Christian lives are witnesses in a largely secular society and that their reaching out and serving goes beyond their own Filipino culture and should include the European, Maori, Island and other cultures as well. It was a stirring way to round out the teaching and fellowship of the past week.

The final full day of Dr Hinkle's and Gracie Johnson's visit was spent on a longer return trip to Wellington via the Mt Bruce Bird Sanctuary, Palmerston North and the Kapiti Coast before flying out the following day, Gracie to her home in the USA and Dr Hinkle to further outreach work in the Philippines. While I am sure both left tired from the hours of fellowship and teaching, they appeared also happy and gratified with what had been accomplished here and that the scope of the toolbox of spiritual disciplines available to us had been enlarged in the hope that a deeper walk in God will bear much fruit in the future.

Media: For some time the church has been airing one-minute "God Spots" free of charge on United Christian Broadcasting in the UK and Ireland. The spots feature a short Gospel message and advertise the church website briefly at the end of the message. These spots can be seen at <http://gracecom.church>. I have just heard from James Henderson in the UK that someone from United Christian Broadcasting has recently moved to Radio Rhema in NZ and asked whether she could air our "God Spots" there, and they have begun to do so. More information about God Spots and their presenter, Ireland church member John Magowan, can be found at <http://www.grace-ni.org/godspots.html>.

Recently I paid \$35 to have the cover article of the latest "Inside Life" magazine sent to over 4,000 people on Facebook. An analysis of results showed that 200 people were "engaged" with the post, clicking it for more information, with 55 saying they "liked" it. A number of people made comments or asked questions, so I had the opportunity to dialogue with them.

SEP 2018: Al Kurzawa has made the following announcement about SEP in Australia:

"We are thrilled to announce that our youth summer camp is back in January 2018. All young people 13 - 18 are invited to be part of this incredible adventure of fun, friendship and faith.

"This year SEP moves to a new home! In fact, we're returning to a much-loved stomping ground of previous SEP generations: Campaspe Downs in Kyneton, Victoria! The last time we held camp at Campaspe, '90s fashion was all the rage... but thankfully the SEP spirit is timeless. The campsite has an outdoor oval, an indoor basketball court, and an indoor pool for some additional activities this SEP. We can't wait to share this campsite with a whole new generation of SEP campers.

"Join us 1 - 9 January 2018 for the best week of your summer! Staff and camper applications will be released mid-year. Check the GCI Australia website and the GCI Youth Facebook page for updates! Any questions? Email sep@gci.org.au - we would love to hear from you!"

Warm regards to all, Rex