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Access to faith and wisdom

# Helping families in the '90s

By Jack Evans

The Intelligencer

Christian families may not necessarily be any more functional than non-Christian families, concludes John Visser, pastor for some 11 years of one of Belleville's largest congregations.

But Christians have access to both faith and God-inspired wisdom which can help overcome dysfunction, or at least learn to live with it in love, humor and good conscience.

That is the topic of Visser's latest and most ambitious book: "Olive Shoots Around Your Table," subtitled: "Raising Functional Kids in a Dysfunctional World."

The Christian family, its problems and solutions, became the theme for a series of sermons to Visser's Maranatha Christian Reformed Church of some 700 souls over an 18-month period, Visser recalled in an interview shortly after the 425-page book rolled off the presses in mid-August. "But it took me another two years to rewrite this material into book form."

The title, Visser notes is an Old Testament description of a believing, functional family, of which the olive, in Hebrew tradition, is the symbol. Since Visser is a Christian minister, it should not be surprising that there are consistently strong biblical overtones to his message.

Scripture is quoted generously and frequently throughout. But as an experienced counsellor, a requirement for such a large flock, Visser also draws on modern psychology and therapy.

"I would call it a blend of psychology and Christian insight with broad appeal," the author suggested.

The book is not a proactive project for Visser. Rather, he sees it as a response to an established need he has seen in his own congregation and throughout the community.

"There's a lot of concern about family and child values and about

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what kind of world we're leaving our children," he said.

"My goal is to help people raise children, especially when there has been family breakdown and pain. Life is connected, and if problems are not resolved in our own life, they will be passed on to our children."

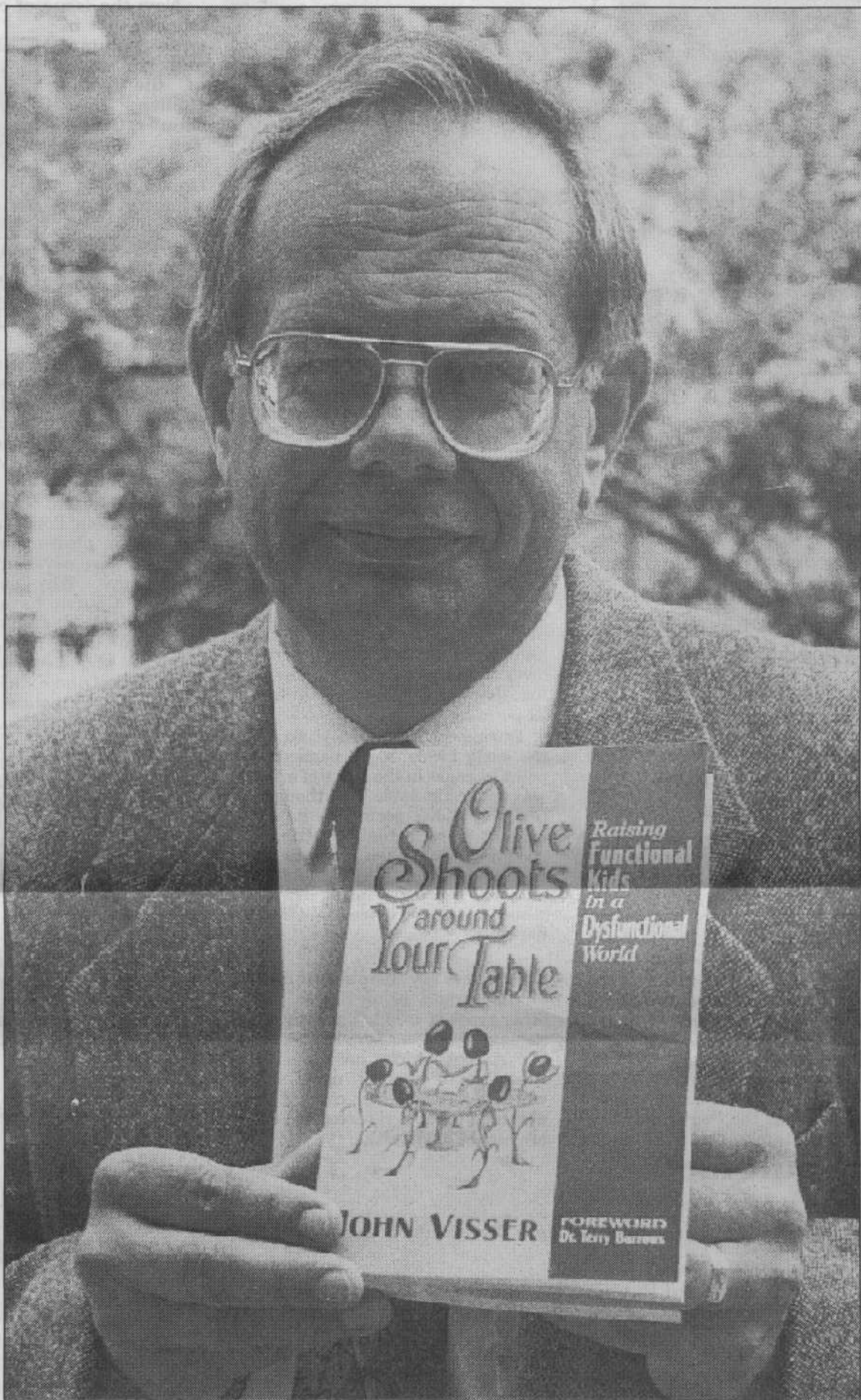
Visser would not win brownie points with modern child psychologists. He insists on corporal punishment for wilful disobedience — i.e., a spanking. But he also insists that spanking nor any other punishment be given in anger, but in love, and after, it should be forgiven and forgotten by both parent and child.

On family matters, Visser can speak with some direct authority. He and his wife, Michelle, have raised four children, now spanning the ages of 12 to 24, and all the children share Visser's own enthusiasm for the content and purpose of this book.

Visser documents "Olive Shoots" with many case histories he has personally experienced, although withholding precise identities, citing both successes and failures, and covering a broad range of typical modern problems such as substance abuse, divorce, abuse, poverty, shame and loneliness. He also calls on his own family nurturing experiences, and points out how prayer, scriptural advice, but mostly love and forgiveness, have produced successful results.

As indicated earlier, this is not Visser's first book. Like Clark Kent who disguises himself as a reporter, Visser is a clergyman disguised as a writer — or perhaps vice versa. This is his sixth book, all of them dealing with contemporary family, moral and social dilemmas in a biblical and Christian context.

The book is being distributed across Canada by Rainbow House Distributors and is for sale in local retail book stores at \$17.95.



Intelligencer photo by Jack Evans

John Visser, pastor of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, has penned another book, Olive Shoots Around the Table.

## Satisfying that itch to write

If one has an itch to write, there's usually an axiomatic need to be published.

Such was the problem facing Pastor John Visser of Belleville's Maranatha Christian Reformed Church when he started writing.

Visser has written six books and all of them have been published.

His secret is his talented young family, at least some of whom have experience in the printing industry.

Visser and his family established Essence Publishing at 103B Cannifton Road, where, in little more than a year, some 15 books by both Canadian and United States authors have been produced.

Specializing in small-volume publications at affordable prices, the reputation of Essence in quality and delivery has spread rapidly, drawing manuscripts from across Canada and as far as Texas.

The business was established by Visser and

his two sons, by buying an existing commercial print shop.

This current season alone, the business is putting out four books.

By far its largest project is Visser's own latest book, "Olive Shoots Around Your Table," which is more than 425 pages per copy and is being distributed across Canada.

Additional equipment and floor space has been added to keep up with the demand even in its first year of operation.

While dedicated primarily to books that are Christian in orientation, the company offers to print non-Christian books providing they are "not explicitly contrary to our beliefs or fall outside the range of acceptable taste."

Along with the printing and publishing venture, Essence represents a sophisticated marketing system. It also has an Internet web site: <http://www.essence.on.ca>