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# faith in FOCUS

Volume 50/8, September 2023

# SCHOOLING

## on the mission field



Image by Matthias Schilling

JoHeath, Faith Academy, Manila on Flickr

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# Editorial

As you contemplate the cover of this issue, I am sure that you will consider the stark contrast between the two images. Yet, these images represent something very important. Firstly, they highlight the necessity and importance of education for children, whether in South Sudan or the Philippines. Secondly, behind these pictures is the struggle to hire teachers. And thirdly, education is vital in the spread of the Gospel, which is of utmost importance for mankind.

It cannot be stated enough that in teaching people, in this case children, to read, it opens up to them a world of possibilities and opportunities which will equip them to make a valuable contribution to their societies. And more importantly they may read the truth of a glorious Saviour, Who in Himself paid the penalty for their sin, and brought about a two-way reconciliation between sinful mankind and an infinitely holy God and Creator of all things.

Recently, while reading my book about Henry Williams and his early years in the north (of New Zealand), I came across a part where Henry described a worship service with the Maori somewhere in the Waikato during one of his expeditions. He was quite surprised when he started singing and praying that the people of that locality sang and prayed along with him "as with one voice", which was very cheering to him. After the worship service, they requested books and slates for reading and writing. He found three boys (as he referred to them) from the Mission, who had lived among his families for some time and it was they who had acted as teachers and taught the Maori the gospel.

Not only did the missionaries learn the language of the indigenous people, but they also taught many young Maori language, reading and writing, and they in turn would go out and teach the people of their own tribes. As you can imagine, this had a profound impact upon Maori, especially as they learnt about loving their Creator and their neighbour, rather than living in the extreme darkness of their depravity and sin.

Likewise, in South Sudan and in Manila in the Philippines we see the effects of a Christian based education. In South Sudan it is helping to bring people out of the darkness of superstition and a troubled history. In Manila the children of missionaries from all over the world are able to go to *Faith Academy* and be equipped for their futures while their parents preach the gospel. The point is, that the Gospel continues to have a positive effect through missionaries working in education overseas, helping to bring people out of darkness and helping others to continue to grow in the light of the gospel, and showing Jesus Christ through their lives.

Are you a teacher and feel you could contribute in a place like South Sudan or Manila, and bring the exciting prospect of the gospel and the glorious works of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ before the eyes of the young? If you are looking for a change, maybe this is a good prospect for you! *S.D.G.*

Miss Marlene van Tonder writes about the joys of breaking through the darkness. Mr Anthony van den Engel informs about the needs for missionaries' children to be educated.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

**NB:** In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.



## Schooling on the mission field

MARLENE VAN TONDER

# Breaking through the darkness!

I look up to see a tiny, shy smile. It's quickly hidden, but I saw it and my heart soared. Yes, you sweet girl, I finally cracked that hard shell. At first you were reluctant. You never joined the games or class activities, you tried to hide your damaged arm, anger radiated from your body. Today was different, today you took the risk, you tried, and you succeeded. Tomorrow you might try and fail, but I know you will have the confidence to weather that storm and I will still be here to hold your hand if you need.

Just a small glimpse into the tiny mud walled classroom in the middle of an average neighbourhood in Torit, South Sudan. So many children who have had little or no opportunity to attend school. So many who have been damaged by trauma: War, famine, drunkenness and a culture of child marriage. It's a rough environment to wake up to each day. But they do it. Their resilience is astounding, and I am continually humbled by it.

South Sudan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Thousands of



Image by Matthias Schilling

The little glimpses of God's light breaking through the deep darkness. Those are the days that make it all worth it.

children do not attend school at all, of those who do, most will not finish high school and many won't even get a basic primary school education. It is a country with its doors wide open. CRE or Christian Religious Education is a part of the national curriculum. Sharing the gospel at school is welcomed! If only there were enough dedicated teachers, or graduates willing to teach, available.

Teachers are always required at all levels. With AIM I work in primary schools, teaching literacy and other subjects as needed. I have also trained teachers, worked in literacy promotion and development and done a brief stint with adult literacy. Currently I sit on the board of a mission school in Juba, Juba Christian Academy, which provides schooling for missionary families based there, particularly MAF.

I have had the privilege over the past nearly ten years to teach many children and adults how to read and write. This is something so basic we take it for granted, yet it's something essential to an independent faith – to have the ability to read the Word of God for ourselves. There are a multitude of opportunities to work in education on the mission field, and in South

Sudan in particular.

One of the girls in my neighbourhood when I first moved to the Lopit Mountains had stopped attending school. I was blessed with the opportunity to be able to teach her to read and write and she returned to complete primary school. She is currently attending high school in Torit and we still meet for weekly Bible studies where she improves her reading comprehension and the Lord deepens her knowledge of Him. In a country where girls seldom complete primary school, due to home demands or early marriage, it is such a blessing to be able to make a difference in at least one life.

Others within our AIM South Sudan Unit serve within education as well. Crystal, in Torit, teaches public health at the Torit Health Science Institute. Jacob, the Laarim team leader, has worked with literacy education to both children and adults. Another Laarim Team member, Tessa, has taught maths and recently started teaching literacy to the lower classes at their local primary school. Andrea in the Lopit Ministry Team hopes to pick up with literacy teaching at her local school now that she has been able to return to her home in the mountains.



Image by Matthias Schilling

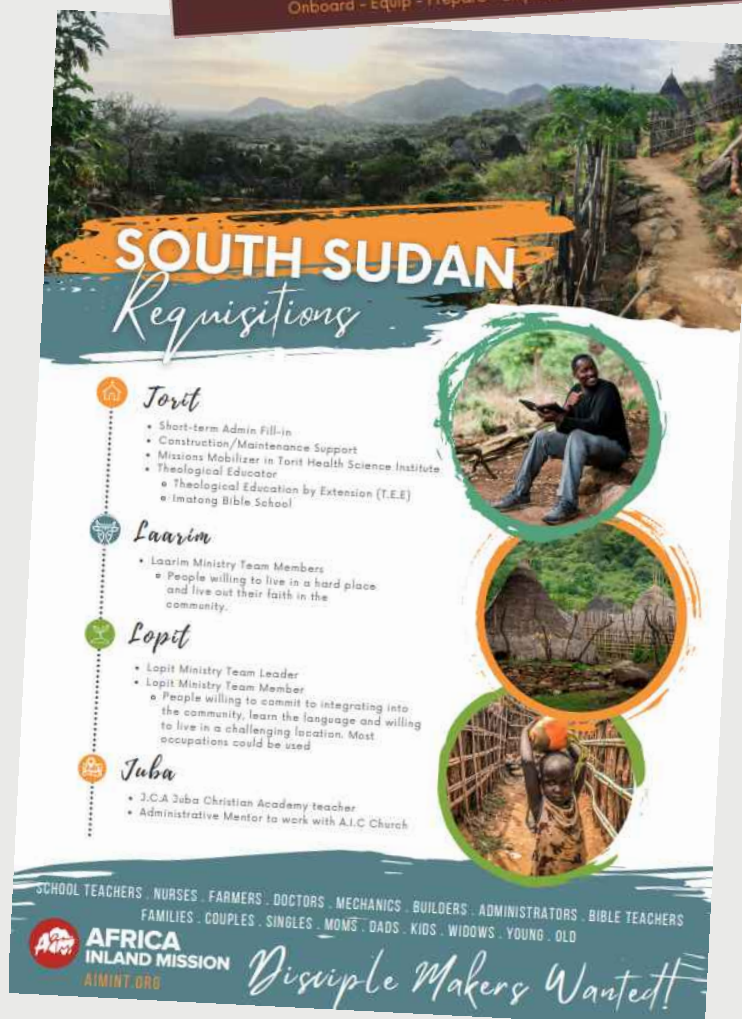
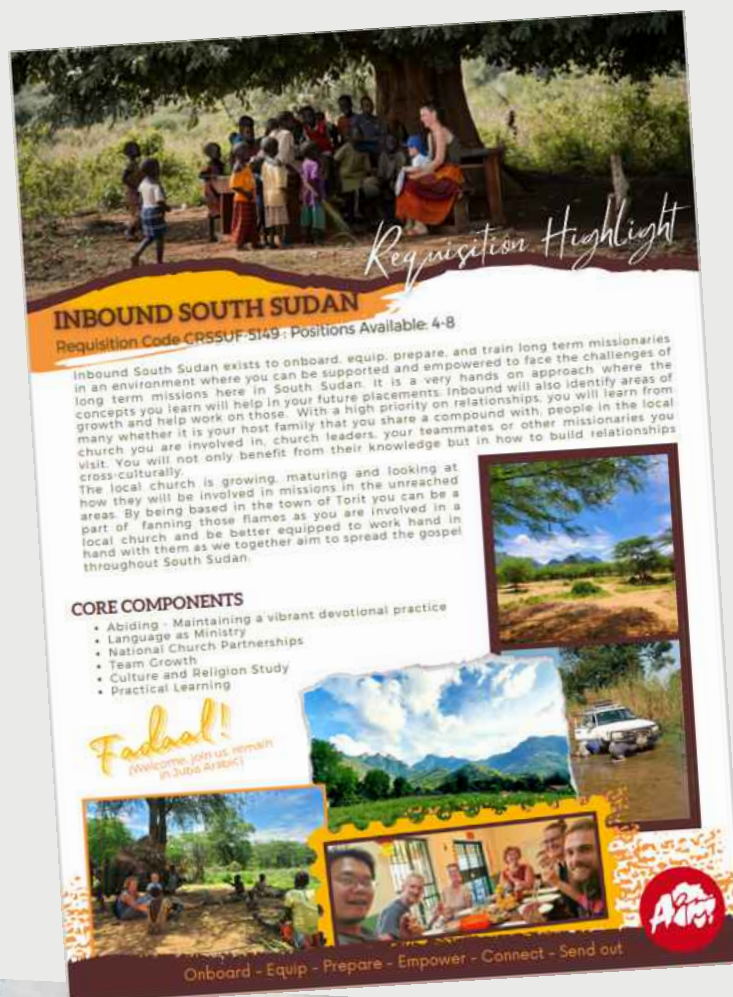


In reality anyone can teach here. If you have finished high school you qualify. All that is required is a willing heart and a whole lot of flexibility and resilience. Most days are chaotic. You will often find yourself alone, the only teacher in attendance, with children from all year levels hanging in the door and windows of the class you teach, desperate for the love and knowledge being shared. Frustration is a guarantee, discouragement also, but so is joy and deep satisfaction. The day that damaged little girl finally smiles, or the most stubborn of boys finally sits for the whole lesson without hitting another child. The child running up to greet you in the market, or smiling knowingly at you as they enter church, those days are the little pieces of gold sprinkled about. The little glimpses of God's light breaking through the deep darkness. Those are the days that make it all worth it.

You can find more information about AIM  
at **[www.aimint.org](http://www.aimint.org)**

## Unit Maintenance and Logistics Officer

Miss Marlene van Tonder works in South Sudan with Africa Inland Mission as a teacher and is a member of the Hukanui Reformed Church.





## Schooling on the mission field

ANTHONY VANDENENGEL

# A life at Faith

*Mr Anthony van den Engel  
with one of the graduating  
students at Faith Academy.*

Faith Academy is a Christian school situated in Cainta, the Philippines. Cainta is just outside the National Capital Region known to most as Metro Manila. Faith Academy has students from what a Kiwi would recognise as Preschool to Year 13. The school year runs from August to May; June and July are our summer holidays. The student body is varied in both background and nationality. About 25% of the

student population is from South Korea, and most of their parents are missionaries serving in the Philippines. Another 30% are Filipino and some of their parents are local pastors and church workers, while others are from more wealthy families who are seeking a quality Christian education for their children. The final large group is from the USA, about 30% of the student population. These students' parents are again mostly missionaries to the Philippines. The fastest growing group of students is from a large country north of the Philippines where Christian education is illegal and the work that the parents do in the country is also often illegal. As of late these students have had more trouble leaving this country to return to the Philippines for their education because of it being a Christian school. Most of these students are living in one of the three boarding homes Faith Academy has on campus and make up about 10% of the student population.

The Mission Statement of Faith Academy reads "Forming Christlike, lifelong learners through a dynamic, relevant education, especially for the children of missionaries." Many parts of the mission statement are very similar to that of most Christian schools; the biggest difference is the focus on the children of missionaries. Part of the way Faith Academy can help students from missionary families is by providing quality education at an affordable price. Government-run schools in the Philippines have large class sizes of around 40 students, focus on rote learning, and are often taught in the local language Tagalog. These schools also do not provide an education that is recognised by international universities. There are local private schools that provide a quality education that is recognised internationally, but their cost is prohibitive to most missionaries. Faith Academy can reduce the cost of education for missionaries in several ways. The first way is by having its teaching staff volunteer their





skills to the school and raise their own monetary support from their home country. This significantly reduces the cost of running a school. Another way the school reduces the cost of education is by changing the cost depending on the student's family situation. If the students are from a local family whose parents do not work for a church or mission organisation they pay full price. Students whose parents work for local churches as pastors or the like, or students from overseas whose parents are serving in their home country, pay a discounted rate. Finally, the highest discounted rate is reserved for students of missionaries who are serving in a country that is not their own. This does not necessarily need to be the Philippines as the school has a boarding program. The school also receives donations for new builds and the general day-to-day running costs from churches outside of the Philippines. This means the school can provide an education at an affordable cost for those who are serving God in the Philippines. Faith Academy's ultimate goal is to provide free education to the children of missionaries.

I, Anthony van den Engel, have been serving at Faith Academy for four years now, starting in August 2019. I first served as a

high school Biology and Bible teacher. I had been teaching mainly Biology and General Science in New Zealand but have always wanted the opportunity to teach Bible. The Biology course at Faith Academy is a one year course similar to what is taught in British schools. This course is taken mainly by what Americans call Freshmen and Sophomores or what Kiwis would call year 10 or 11 students. Here you can see a major difference between New Zealand high schools and Faith Academy. From my teaching experience it is very rare to have classes with mixed grade levels, but this is not the case at Faith Academy. There are several different academic tracks at Faith Academy and while students are usually with their age group for classes such as English and Bible, the Science and Math classes are divided on interest, ability and future goals. Thus in my first year teaching one of my three Biology classes, all had the same curriculum, and four different grade levels in it. Another major difference I found is that I do not have as much lesson planning to do as I am teaching the same content to multiple classes. In New Zealand, I had generally been teaching five different classes, but in the Philippines, I only have to plan two lessons as the content I am teaching is the same for multiple classes. At

**“Forming Christlike, lifelong learners through a dynamic, relevant education, especially for the children of missionaries.”**

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*As with most well established schools, physical activity is promoted as part of the full package in the education of the students.*





first, I thought it would be boring to teach the same lesson multiple times a day. While it can get repetitive, less planning means more time for individual students and a less stressed teacher. It meant that in the school year that ended in May 2023 I was even able to teach six classes, which is technically over a full-time load, without any extra lesson planning. I needed to do this because we were short-staffed and this was particularly true in the science department. This is a constant issue for schools like ours, but more about this later.

*The pursuit of academic excellence is promoted at Faith Academy. These images show the dissection of a frog and chemistry classes.*

Teaching classes that are majority non-European has been enjoyable and has taught me a lot about other cultures. In general, I would say that both Korean and Filipino students are very respectful of teachers. This means that behaviour management in

my classes at Faith Academy is relatively easy, compared to both Christian and non-Christian schools in New Zealand. But cultural and language differences do bring their challenges. Communication between parents and teachers can be more difficult if the parents do not speak English well. Also, many students have learnt English with an American accent, so my Kiwi accent and colloquialism can put up barriers to understanding. This can be further hindered by a cultural difference where asking questions of the teacher is not encouraged in some Asian cultures. In saying this, seeing students from many nationalities all worship God together is a small taste of what heaven will be like. It has also been amazing to hear about the work that many of our parents do to build the church here in the Philippines. We have parents that are educating new Filipino pastors, people working in Bible translation, feeding the poor, running orphanages, church planting, livelihood projects and many more ways. One common theme many of the missionary parents are involved in is helping the Filipino Churches become self-sustaining and doing their own mission work for their own people, especially connecting to unreached tribal groups and Muslims.

One question I often get asked is why there needs to be mission work in the Philippines – is it not a majority Catholic nation? While it is true that many Filipinos would consider themselves Catholics and I am sure there are a large number of committed Catholics, many are catholic only in name, or in tribal groups where it is blended with animist religions. Furthermore, there is a lot of saint worship and a salvation-by-works mentality. Hopefully, you can see from this brief description there is still a great need for the gospel in the Philippines.

Zoe (9) and Ezra (7), two of my children, have attended Faith Academy for 4 years and 2 years respectively. This school year was the first that they completed fully in person, due to Covid and government policy around it. Their attendance of Faith Academy has been a huge blessing to our family and allowed both Nicole (my wife) and I to be dedicated to our respective mission work during school hours. Nicole works at a birthing clinic that provides free pregnancy-related care to poor women while sharing the Gospel. Most of these women are living on less than fifteen New Zealand dollars a day for their families. She is also working with a team to start a small







free to low-cost hospital to help this same community as healthcare-related bills can cripple these families. By providing accessible and excellent basic healthcare there is great opportunity to heal physical ailments while also introducing many to Jesus for spiritual healing. Without Faith Academy, our kids would need to be homeschooled for the reasons stated above, and one of us parents would need to stop our ministries to focus on this. Our children have benefited from a high-quality education from dedicated and skilled teachers. While they may never read this article I would like to personally thank Shirley-Anne Thompson, Wendy Lock, Leanne Hong, and Caleb MacKay for teaching my children not just their academics but also guiding their individual faiths as well. Christian Schools for the children of missionaries are critically important to provide missionary families access to education that does not disadvantage their children's futures, that cares for their faith and reinforces lessons taught at home, all while freeing parents to do the work God has called them to do. An added benefit is that it gives access to students to meet other young people who are like them. Other peers who have left their home country and culture and are working through the daily challenges that brings. Things like the struggle to be understood, strange food, missing family and (at least in the Philippines) hot weather.

One of the major challenges for schools like Faith Academy is staffing. As mentioned above, staff are not paid and raise support in their home countries. So while Faith Academy has high-quality staff it can be hard to attract new staff. Also,

because teachers are raising their own support money and moving country they often need twelve months to prepare to come, meaning recruiting is ideally done 18-24 months in advance. The issue with this is you do not always know the student population and what teachers are moving on and what teachers are staying at that point. This means as a school we end up in situations like we are now (July 2023) searching for high school Math and English teachers for a school year that starts in August 2023. The school is trying to help attract new teachers and keep current teachers by offering things like housing allowance, student debt repayment and highly discounted school fees for children of teachers. While this is helping, staffing is still a big issue for Faith Academy and other schools in this model. Please pray for teachers to be willing to serve the students of missionaries so that the parents can further the gospel all over the Philippines and the world.

*If you would like to know more feel free to email me at [anthony.vandenengel@faith.edu.ph](mailto:anthony.vandenengel@faith.edu.ph) or Faith Academy at [vanguard@faith.edu.ph](mailto:vanguard@faith.edu.ph).*

*Mr Anthony van den Engel is a member of the Hukanui Reformed Church.*



The Free Reformed School Association (Tas) Inc. invites applications for the following positions:

# TEACHERS

**Urgently require Secondary and Primary teachers for 2023**

**Full-Time, Part-Time,  
12-month or 6-month  
appointments accepted**

At JCS, our vision is to be a *strongly connected* community of learners, *deeply committed* to our faith and to continual growth, nurturing individuals to be their best in the service of God and to His glory.

We are looking to add enthusiastic, committed teachers to our team for the 2023 school year. Due to growing class sizes we need additional, suitably qualified, teachers. Applications for full-time and part-time employment welcome, with 6-month or 12-month appointments considered.

John Calvin School currently has over 120 students from Kinder to Grade 10 with an average combined class size of 19. We are a well-resourced school, located in Launceston, a beautiful city in the north of Tasmania, a breathtaking part of God's creation. (<https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/>)

Applicants must be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches, be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and be registered to work with vulnerable people.

Conditions and salary are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

Expressions of interest for future positions, full-time or part-time, are welcome.

For application forms, see the school website ([www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment](http://www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment)).

Forward completed applications to the Business Manager:

- E-mail: [wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au](mailto:wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au)
- Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

For more information, contact the Principal, Mr Daniel Coote

- E-mail: [cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au](mailto:cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au)

## Letters from New Zealand

D. G. VANDERPYL

### July 1993

It's the time of year that AGM's come and go. Sometimes I wonder what sort of genuine impact these meetings have on the session and congregation. The congregation gets a peep behind treasury's curtain and confirms at the times unimaginative budget for the next twelve months. Reports are given of church activities, which more often than not are routinely presented with the usual platitudes and other pious remarks. We keep as eye on our watches, socialise briefly afterwards with a cuppa and some cake and go home again till next time. In my younger days, we used to have real firebrands who lived from one AGM to the next to "get at the session and all the others in authority over them." We loved every minute of it except for those mischief-makers themselves. Sometimes these people left in exasperation for another church, however, more often than not, they were replaced by another identical type of rebel, waiting in the wings to carry on with their real or imagined gripes. I learned in the army that it was better to cocoon such people as much as was possible, knowing that if he was shot or transferred, another would take his place.

But what I am getting at, after all I have said in the previous paragraph, is how small the consequences, how unimaginative and lacking in vision our AGM's are. Are we really there to work out a "plan de campaign" for the new year? Even the timing is misplaced nowadays. It MUST be held after the treasurer has completed the books of the past financial year. And hence, an AGM really hinges around a "financial period" instead of an ANNO DOMINO 1993 or whatever. Shouldn't it therefore be held sometime in October or early November, well prepared and centred around visionary planning in areas of internal (spiritual) and external (outreach) growth in and for another year of the Lord? Property management and treasury can then be seen at a secondary general meeting in May and incorporate the cost of any decisions that were made at the previous main AGM.

Attendance will be quite predictable. One congregation experienced this when

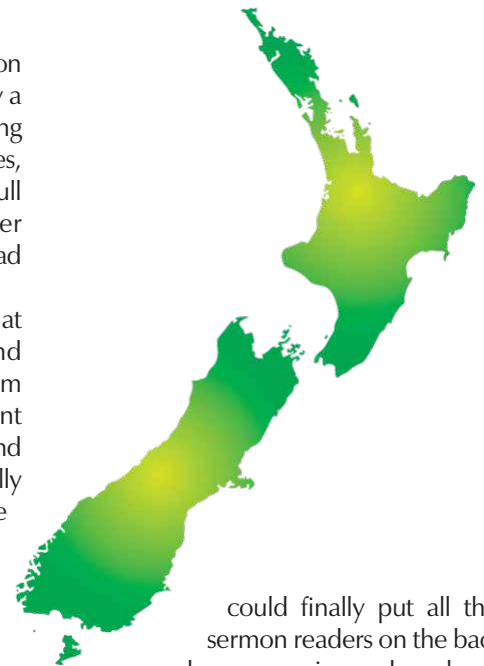
a meeting was called for an open discussion on church extension and outreach. Only a handful came, but when another meeting was called to discuss some mundane issues, involving dollars and cents, there was a full house. "Tch, tch, tch," my grandfather would have muttered under his breath, had he been there.

The Avondale session met together at a special meeting to discuss goals and developments in the areas of evangelism and outreach activities. They also spent some considerable time on the format and content of their worship services, especially in the areas of participation by the congregation .... [Dirk]. van Garderen's session agreed to allow their minister, to present a course of lectures at the newly established Christian Teachers' College in Auckland, at the Bible College some time later in the year and at the Waiholo Camp near Dunedin. He is a good gettabout, my friend and brother Dirk.

One more thing before I leave Avondale. For a number of years, Avondale hosted two extra church groups between both the morning and the evening hours of worship. Immediately after the morning service, the Koreans met at 12.30pm for worship in their native tongue and at 2.30pm the Niueans met for worship, also in their own language.

The Koreans have now decided to move their centre of worship to the North Shore, a suburb north of Auckland, as many of their people live in that locality. The group began with only three families but has now grown to well over a hundred members, all in the space of two years. Their pastor, Rev. Nam Woo Taek expects a further increase to well over two hundred in about two Months' time. Some of us could well do with such a PMA (positive mental attitude). These people have been encouraged to become part of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. This congregation is still officially affiliated with the Ko Sin (Presbyterian) Church in Korea, which has sister church relations with the Free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and Australia. Apparently, there are another five identical congregations in Australia.

The Wellington congregation is full of smiles. After several years of vacancy, they



could finally put all their sermon readers on the backburner again and welcome their new minister, Rev. Bob Brenton to their pulpit. It must have been a real feast day for them all. He hails from the Christian Reformed Churches in North America, and gladly submitted himself to a colloquium doctum, so precious enshrined in our New Zealand Church Order, which he passed with full honours, I was told. The "learned discussion" centred around four areas of church faith and practice and his responses were to the full satisfaction of the Wellington Presbytery and the Synodical Examiners representing the other two presbyteries.

This Presbytery also discussed at length a study paper on *Who Should Lead in Worship?* According to one of the bulletins I received, the debate produced a marked divergence of views but was conducted in a brotherly spirit. The outcome was a motion, with four grounds attached (which I don't have), reading as follows: "That the churches of the presbytery be advised to refrain from allowing women to read or pray in the worship services." The motion was passed by a majority vote.

The Retirees Club of Wainuiomata have been "trekking" through the mountains of the South Island, not with the old Afrikaner Boer-carts, but in their super mobile homes. The whole congregation apparently held their breath as they farewelled the convoy of Opas and Omas for their 5-week tour. It was reported in their bulletin



# For such a time as this – Kate Sheppard

BY MOANA LEENDERS

Kate Sheppard, (1847 – 1934), was a humanitarian, social activist, and Christian who embodied the gospel as an educator and an advocate. Examining her work and writings, we can ascertain that God placed her in the right time, at the right place, to give leadership at an important time in New Zealand's history. Enfranchisement for women is her legacy. Sheppard's life displays a deep commitment to the gospel principles of justice and equality for all. Sheppard's outstanding example can inspire us as we embody the gospel in our present day.

Sheppard lived through a time of great societal change. Secondary education became possible for girls, and in 1871, at the foundation of the University of New Zealand, women were included as students, equipping women to work in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> Worldwide women formed committees to petition parliament for reformation of laws to improve social conditions.<sup>2</sup> The first national suffrage committee was formed in London in 1872.

Sheppard was a child when her father died and perhaps this sparked her love for those who suffered through no fault of their own.<sup>3</sup> After her father's death she was sent to live with her uncle in Nairn, Scotland, a minister of the Free Church in Scotland.<sup>4</sup> This denomination believed that Christians must work for the good of all people.<sup>5</sup> Her uncle inspired Sheppard's love of great causes.<sup>6</sup>

Sheppard arrived in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1868. With her family, she joined the Trinity Congregational Church, a church likely influenced by the teachings of Congregationalist evangelist, D.L. Moody. Moody was part of a larger



interdenominational evangelism movement that preached Christian spirituality combined with social activism to change the world for Christ.<sup>7</sup> As a Congregationalist, Sheppard was encouraged towards active independent thought, building a foundation for her pioneering work in the Suffrage movement. Sheppard was well educated and enjoyed intellectual discussion.<sup>8</sup> Her work within the church community revealed her talent for leadership and her passion for social activism. Sheppard was active in the Trinity Ladies' Association and was a committee member of the YWCA where she learnt skills and displayed talents that were used in her subsequent work for the Women's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>9</sup>

Margaret Lovell-Smith's collection of the writings of the leaders of the WCTU contains nearly 40 articles written by Sheppard. This collection gives us Sheppard's own words and an understanding of her motives and vision.



Glass Plate Negative: Kate W. Sheppard, Clifford, Canterbury Museum, 1980.175.144

Sheppard believed care for others was divine law and women were to promote goodwill in their community as they did in their homes.<sup>10</sup> For Sheppard, her Christian faith meant living “life in earnest,” and conscientiously developing the talents God had given her.<sup>11</sup> Sheppard often referred to the parable of the Good Samaritan as motivation for her humanitarian work. Her appreciation for the gospel produced a vision for societal improvement.

### **Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Electoral Act Reform of the 1880/90s.**

As a humanitarian activist Sheppard was attracted to the work of the New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union.<sup>12</sup> In 1885, Sheppard was a founding member of this interdenominational union run by women, for women. Their slogan was “For God, and Home, and Humanity,” and their objective was public education “to encourage abstinence and secure legal prohibition of the liquor traffic.”<sup>13</sup> Members identified as “a body of Christian women called by His name and doing His work.”<sup>14</sup> WCTU members provided: shelter for the homeless, soup kitchens, prisoner reintegration, prison visiting, and helping single mothers find employment and homes, embodying the gospel principle of seeking the lost (Luke 14:23). The only conditions of WCTU membership were to sign the abstinence pledge and pay a small fee.<sup>15</sup>

As a leader in the WCTU Sheppard joined others writing and speaking to educate women on social and legal injustice and the need for reform. Lovell-Smith describes WCTU leaders as familiar with Scripture, giving the moral foundation for their work.<sup>16</sup> The WCTU understood that collectively women had a stronger voice to influence societal change.<sup>17</sup> Sheppard’s writing demonstrates how her Christian understanding of equality and justice formed her vision of a better world for women and children.

Sheppard’s initial work with the WCTU was petitioning Parliament to prohibit the sale of alcohol to juveniles and to ban the employment of barmaids.<sup>18</sup> The WCTU believed a barmaid’s work was degrading and exposed women to propositions or threats from intoxicated males. The unrestricted sale of liquor was leaving women and children vulnerable to neglect and poverty.<sup>19</sup> WCTU also petitioned Parliament to abolish the Contagious Diseases Act. This discriminatory act enforced examination for venereal disease for

suspected prostitutes, with no equal measures for their patrons.<sup>20</sup>

After Parliament repeatedly dismissed their petitions, the WCTU knew they needed the vote to influence change.<sup>21</sup> From a women’s perspective Parliament was not working for the good of the whole community, but rather, enabling the continued abuse and neglect of women and children. Gaining the vote for women was the necessary pathway to the social reform they sought.

Amendment to the Electoral bill was needed. The Electoral bill qualified electors as “every person of 21 years or upwards, who had resided in New Zealand for one year, and lived in their electoral district for six months.”<sup>22</sup> In order for women to attain franchise, they petitioned that the explanatory note: “Person does not include female” be removed.<sup>23</sup> In 1887 Sheppard was appointed National Superintendent of franchise and legislation department of WCTU.<sup>24</sup> Two members of Parliament, Alfred Saunders, and Sir John Hall, were Sheppard’s chief political advisers.<sup>25</sup>

### **Justice and Equality**

*“Woman must be free to work for humanity in whatever capacity for which God has fitted her. For the community has ample need for every power for good possessed by any and every member.”<sup>26</sup>*

Sheppard maintained that the gospel truth of shared humanity must take precedence over womanhood, as all are citizens concerned with the wellbeing of New Zealanders.<sup>27</sup> Sheppard claimed women’s rights to influence public life, and to work with men to build a prosperous New Zealand. Sheppard repeatedly proposed that women’s suffrage would benefit all citizens in creating an equitable society.

Sheppard’s campaign maintained that justice was the key reason women’s citizenship should include enfranchisement.<sup>28</sup> Reason number one was “that every adult person, not convicted of crime, nor suspected of lunacy, has an inherent right to a voice in the construction of laws which all must obey.”<sup>29</sup> Repeatedly Sheppard stressed that women should not be categorized with criminals and lunatics. “Women were interested in peace, law and order, and the education and moral welfare of children.”<sup>30</sup> Women were obliged to obey the law; therefore, they should have a say in who made the law.<sup>31</sup> Men had franchise on an equal basis, women should gain franchise also, Sheppard argued.



Opposition to the enfranchisement of women waged a campaign of ridicule, contending that men would lose all freedom and women would gain total control. Strongest opposition came from the liquor trade who referred to Suffragists as the *Shrieking Sisterhood* and *Unwomanly Women*. However, historian Patricia Grimshaw recounts contemporary praise given to the WCTU, “the society must be acknowledged to be one of the grandest

philanthropic and religious movements the world has ever known.”<sup>32</sup>

On 19 September 1893 the women of New Zealand gained the vote. In her victory speech Sheppard commissioned women to vote for candidates of good character, men of integrity who sought the good of humanity.<sup>33</sup> After successful enfranchisement, in two months the WCTU enrolled 109,451 women to vote, (88% of the total adult female population). Anti-suffrage voices claiming that women didn’t want the vote were proved emphatically wrong. Reflecting on the Women’s Franchise in an editorial for the *White Ribbon*, February 1903, Sheppard listed all the legislative activity since 1893 that had improved the life of women and children.<sup>34</sup> Thus, validating the Suffragists claim that giving women the vote improved societal conditions in New Zealand.<sup>35</sup>

Him, whose birth we celebrate; that we may love our neighbour as ourselves.”<sup>37</sup>

Sheppard lived “life in earnest” and she worked tirelessly, for all New Zealanders.<sup>38</sup> She recognized the vulnerability of the family of the alcoholic and her compassion motivated her to change the world for the sake of these little ones whom the Father loves (Matt 19:14). Sheppard interpreted the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesus teaching us to override any social constraints to minister to others (Luke 10: 25-37).<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly society was blessed with the fruit of Sheppard’s work, however, many of the social problems she recognized are still prevalent today. Christians guided by the gospel principles that motivated Sheppard are still needed today. There remains opportunity for us to live life in earnest and work for humanity in whatever capacity God has equipped us for.

## Appendix 1

Adoption of Children Act

Age of Consent raised from 14 to 16

Communicative Diseases Acts repealed

Divorce Law Reform

Establishment of Juvenile Courts

Industrial Schools Act Amendment

Infants’ Life Protection Act (introduced licensed childcare to prevent baby farming)

Labour laws to safeguard health, hours of work, holidays, and minimum wage enforced

Licensing Act Amendment

Prison Reform

Sale of Cigarettes to Minors Act

Sale of Liquor to Minors Act

Servants’ Registry Offices Act

Slander of Women Act

Summary Separation Act (protection to working women against worthless husbands).

Testator’s Family Maintenance Act (to ensure a man left suitable provision for his wife and family).

Widows’ Pension Act and Old Age Pension (for both men and women)

Inebriate Asylums established

Technical Schools established

Women lawyers admitted to Courts

Equal rights for women to the guardianship of their children, 1926

Women could be appointed Justices of the Peace, 1927

## Kate Sheppard – the Christian

Sheppard’s work for justice and equality, embodying the petition “Your Will be Done, on earth as it is in Heaven” (Matt 6:10), is an enduring example for Christians in New Zealand. Her promotion of the right of the common citizen to have every opportunity to prosper continues to be a necessary work for Christians today. Sheppard esteemed the dignity of all humanity (Gen 1:27). Writing in 1919 she extrapolated from Proverbs 22:2:

“It has been realized that the peer and the peasant, the male and the female, are fashioned out of one common clay: that the accident of birth or the incidence of sex cannot be allowed to bar the right of each human being to self-development.”<sup>36</sup>

She worked from the belief that what was beneficial to the individual would be a blessing to all. New Zealand still has citizens that are disadvantaged by accident of birth. Like Sheppard, Christians today need to compassionately advocate and stand in solidarity with the poor.

Sheppard’s talents were leadership and communication. Her writing in *The Prohibitionist* and *The White Ribbon*, spread the gospel message of justice and equality. Educating the privileged about life conditions of the less fortunate sparked a national movement for equality. Her example of an active, faithful advocate for the disadvantaged, still speaks to today’s church. Sheppard’s *White Ribbon* editorial at Christmastime 1897 shows how her faith motivated her work: “Those who claim brotherhood with Christ must also claim kinship with the erring and the suffering. Lord, open our eyes that we may be like

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- 7 Peter Lineham, “The Unexplained Religion of the WCTU,” *PJBR* 9 (2014): 22-34, 29. Ira Sankey worked alongside Moody and the WCTU sang Sankey’s hymns at their meetings.
- 8 Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard*, 6
- 9 Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard*, 14. Young Women Christian Association, where prayer, hymn singing, and Bible reading were incorporated in the gatherings.
- 10 Kate Sheppard, in “The Woman Question” Lovell-Smith, 130.
- 11 Sheppard, in “The Woman Question,” Lovell-Smith, 132.
- 12 Subsequently written as WCTU.
- 13 WCTU Pledge, *White Ribbon*, 1 September 1949, 2.
- 14 *White Ribbon*, 1, (May 1895), 4. WCTU meetings began with prayer and a hymn.
- 15 WCTU support primarily came from non-conformist churches, such as Methodist, Baptists, and Salvation Army. Presbyterian and Anglican Churches were divided on the issue of suffrage, with many supporting the traditional view that a woman’s place was solely in the home.
- 16 Lovell-Smith “The Woman Question,” 25.
- 17 Patricia Grimshaw, “Politicians and Suffragettes, Women’s Suffrage in New Zealand, 1891-1893,” *NZJH* 4 (1970): 160-177, 165.

- 18 Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard*, 19.
- 19 Men would spend the family's income at the tavern. Sheppard advocated for women to receive a portion of their husband's wage direct.
- 20 This act operated against women only, and innocent women were subjected to false charges. Sheppard and others proposed hospital wards where sufferers could voluntarily go to get treatment. Lovell-Smith, *The Woman Question*, 183.
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## Dusted off nuggets

IAN KOENS

# Pharisees

Many of you who read this are familiar with Jesus telling off the Pharisees – good and proper. Said He, *'You are of your father the devil. Brood of vipers, woe to you, fools, hypocrites and blind guides! You are like whitewashed tombs, serpents! On you will come all the righteous blood of those whom you murdered.'*

This raised several questions: 'Who actually were the Pharisees? Where did they come from? What did they do to deserve such a strongly worded dressing down? Were they all like that?' Extending this, 'How far did the Pharisees' influence reach – as far as Australia, as far as today?'

When the mind niggles like that, there's only one thing for it: find a spade and dig.

### Pharisees – the word

Literally the word Pharisee means *those who have been set aside* or *ones who lead separate lives*. It denotes those who strictly observe rules, regulations in the most formalistic sense.

However, after Jesus addressed them, the word *Pharisee* became synonymous

with people who display a great deal of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Indeed, we're looking at religious leaders who bound burdens on believers but weren't too fussed in keeping these themselves.

### Pharisees – where from?

Some sources hold that the Pharisees were a sect that had its origin in the Hasideans: The Pious Ones. These people, all orthodox Jews, joined the Maccabees in their revolt against Greek paganism in 167BC. If you have access to the apocryphal books, the story is recorded in 1 Maccabees, second chapter.

Some years later, the Jewish historian Josephus also mentions the Pharisees and sees them as having narrow views on doctrine and life. He also writes about the growing rift between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees themselves claimed to be descendants of Abraham. Drawing on this lineage, they felt that their position was divinely appointed and approved by God.

Although the connection may be tenuous, in a wider perspective the Pharisees remind us of Numbers 6 that describes ordinary Israelites making a vow and live as Nazarites for a limited time. They were to separate themselves from many aspects of daily life and live as priests, holy to the Lord. Paul the Apostle writes about this concept as well. We also know of permanent Nazarites such as Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist.

This *separation concept* also finds its way into the early Christian Church when ascetics, hermits and abstinents became popular.

### Pharisees – their reach and number

The Rabbis – many of whom were Pharisees – used the Torah as the basis for their instruction. The Torah refers to the law as we find it in the Pentateuch. In turn, the Pentateuch is the collective word for the five books of Moses, the first five books in the Bible.

The way the Rabbis understood the Torah was recorded in the Talmud. This



contains the comments, legal decisions and interpretations of Jewish civil, moral and ceremonial law. It incorporates the Mishnah, the Baraita and the Gemara.

The Mishnah – please stay with me – is a collection of explanatory written material, capturing the oral tradition of Jewish law and forms the first part of the Talmud. (*Question: once an oral tradition has been transcribed, is it still an oral tradition?*)

The Baraita is another source of oral traditions, but is not part of the Mishnah.

The Gemara is a commentary on the Mishnah and forms the second part of the Talmud.

Summing up these complicated paragraphs by making it more complex still; the Pharisees had a preoccupation with ethics rather than doctrine and wove a complex web of sticky strands, binding the people to a myriad of do's and don'ts on all spheres of their lives, especially the ethics of business – and they used the Talmud to base this on. And the Talmud is... (no, let's quit here.)

As far as their influence on the Jewish people goes, while officially the Pharisees may have left the historical scene a hundred or so years after Christ, many of the practices and prohibitions of modern Judaism can be traced back to their strict adherence to their oral traditions.

Another indication of their hold on the people was the careful way Herod the Great treated the Pharisees. While not Great in admiring the Jewish religion, it seems he was careful enough not to alienate the Pharisees.

The Bible itself, of course, gives the clearest indication of the grip the Pharisees had on the people.

As far as their number is concerned, accounts differ. One source mentions a figure of six thousand full Pharisees. Another informant writes that some five percent of the Jewish population were Pharisees and claims that the Sanhedrin – the High Court of Israel – was influenced by them.

### **Pharisees – all the same?**

Like many sects, Pharisees were organised into small, separate sections. Entry wasn't open for all, and an elaborate process preceded full acceptance – a kind of apprenticeship.

The condemnations of Jesus, however, were against the *extreme* Pharisees, those who insisted the Jews observe the law in its minutest detail, while neglecting to keep these themselves.

The Talmud mentions the following groups.

**The Dashers** (or Bandy-legged) scarcely lifted their feet from the ground in walking but dashed them against the uneven stones. The purpose was to make people think that their minds were totally absorbed in holy thought.

**The Mortars** wore a mortar (a kind of cap) which would not allow them to see the passers-by so that their meditations might not be disturbed. Did Jesus have this group in mind when he said, 'Having eyes they saw not?'

**The Bleeders** inserted thorns in the borders of their garments to pierce their legs when walking.

**The Cryers or Inquirers** went about crying, 'Let me know my duty, and I will do it.' The rich young ruler wouldn't have belonged to them, would he...?

**The Almsgivers** had a trumpet sounding before them to summon the poor together. Jesus told His disciples not to use trumpets but that acts of charity should be done in secret.

**The Stumblers** (or Bloody-browed) shut their eyes when they went about that they might see no woman. Jesus called them the blind leading the blind.

**The Immovables** who stood like statues, for hours praying in the marketplaces. Our Lord identifies this group very clearly.

**The Pestle Pharisees** kept themselves bent double like the handle of a pestle.

**The Strong-shouldered** walked with their back bent as if carrying on their shoulders the whole burden of the law. This group, too, is singled out by Jesus.

**The Dyed Pharisees'** devotion was often cloaked in hypocrisy and moral uncleanness. The Lord called them White Sepulchers.

Not all Pharisees belonged to these sub-sects, nor could all Pharisees be accused of hypocrisy. Gamaliel, for example, is a shining example of wisdom, while Nicodemus helped with the embalming of Jesus' body. Other Pharisees warned Jesus that His life was in danger while others still invited our Lord into their homes.

### **The Pharisees have gone?**

Although the Pharisees – as an identifiable group – have left the scene centuries ago, it would still be remiss if we didn't do some self searching to see if any residue remains.

Individually speaking, Pharisaism is an attitude, a disposition locked in a person's

mind and heart. One person, observing self-imposed rules, and doing it for conscience' sake in the Lord's service, cannot be accused of Pharisaism. Another – his brother – bound by his conscience and his desire to honour the Lord, observes fewer rules and seems to be a lot more at ease with the 'law of liberty'. Paul addresses both when he tells them not to judge each other.

Conversely, should we obey a thousand rules because these rules define us – then we are well on the way to being a Pharisee – in fact, we may well be one. Then, submitting to a thousand rules has no more merit than reading a thousand books because you like reading.

It is no more meritorious than sawing a thousand planks because you like sawing. The question is, what did you make from all those planks? How have you used the knowledge you gained after reading a thousand books...?

When the system of our life is not subservient to the very purpose of the Church – the place where grace abounds and where hope shines forth – Pharisaism takes over. Although this hasn't been spelled out and no specific examples were given, this also applies just as much to the System in our churches.

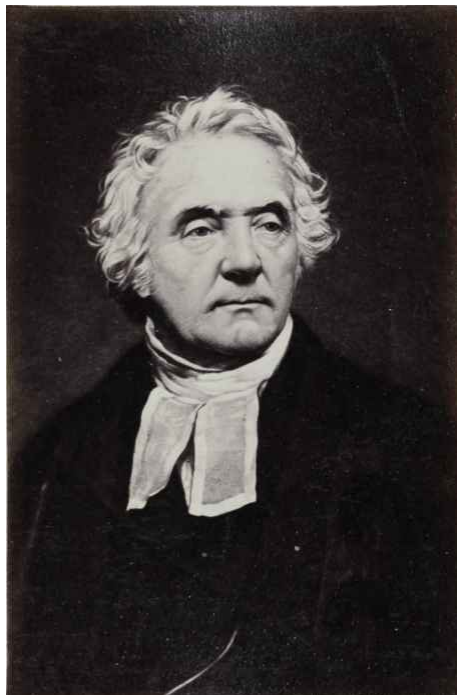
No wonder Jesus the Rabbi gave the Pharisees a tongue lashing – His Church was at stake. No wonder Paul the Preacher wrote as he did – His Master's Church is still at stake!

*Mr Ian Koens is a member of the Free Reformed Church in Bunbury, Western Australia. He is an avid student and writer of church history. Used with permission.*

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## Focus on faith

THOMAS CHALMERS



*Lent by the Senatus of the Free Church College, Edinburgh. The Rev. Thomas Chalmeus, D.D., LL.D., Oxon., D.C.L. and corresponding member of the Institute of France. Born at Anstruther, 1780 ; died at Morningside, 1847.*  
en.wikipedia.org

## In a few years!

"For we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a *shadow*." Job 8:9

"He springs up like a *flower* and withers away; like a *fleeting shadow*, he does not endure." Job 14:2

"Only a few years will pass before I go on the journey of no return!" Job 16:22

"My days are like the evening *shadow*; I wither away like *grass*." Psalm 102:11

"Man is like a *breath*; his days are like a *fleeting shadow*." Psalm 144:4

How transient is human life – yet no one lays it to heart. With the magnificence of eternity before us – let *fleeting time*, with all its fluctuations, dwindle into its own littleness.

**In a few years** our heads will be laid in the cold grave, and the green turf will cover us. The children who come after us will tread upon our graves.

They will *weep* for us a few days.

They will *talk* of us a few months.

They will *remember* us a few years.

Then our memory shall disappear from the face of the earth, and not a tongue shall be found to recall it!

The character with which we sink into the grave at death, is the very character with which we shall reappear at the final judgment!

"O God, impress upon me *the value of time*, and give regulation to all my thoughts and to all my actions. O God, help me to live for Your glory. As the years roll over me, may I withdraw my affections from time, and feel that in moving through the world, I am moving toward eternity!"

"So teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Psalm 90:12

**(Thomas Chalmers, 1780-1847)**

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## Focus on the Christian life

### Standing as a minority

All our lives we are cajoled to believe that the majority of people carry an aura of moral authority and compelling conviction. Being part of a minority makes us feel isolated and uneasy; being with the 51% and over makes us feel democratic and safe. Since no man has a monopoly on wisdom, there is some truth in this. The

Bible itself tells us that 'in an abundance of counselors there is safety' (Prov.11:14). This is one of the texts used in the Westminster Confession to justify the Church's meeting in synods and councils. It does go hand in hand with the warning that 'All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred' (WCF XXX.iv). Our own subordinate standard seems to reflect on decisions of the courts of the Church, but let us pass over that for the moment.

As Christians in the Western world

increasingly find themselves on the margins of society, this will open up dangers but also possibilities. Moses tells us not to fall in with the many to do evil (Ex.23:2). At the Nuremberg trials in 1946 Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, said that he never thought whether killing Jews was right or wrong; he was just following orders. This became known as the Nuremberg defence, and it was not accepted. God declares that we are responsible for our own sins. Unbelievers may argue against such a view, but deep in their souls and in times of terrible sin, they recognise its truth.



The minority are not always right, but they have been right many times through history – and at crucial times. An example that is commonly referred to is found in Numbers 13-14 where Moses sent out twelve men – one from each tribe – to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten of them gave the majority report, which was true so far as it went: the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey, notably with grapes, pomegranates and figs, but the people were big and strong, and the cities were well fortified. The minority report from Joshua and Caleb acknowledged that the Israelites seemed like grasshoppers compared to the Canaanites, but pointed out the deciding factor – that God had promised this land to the Israelites.

Church history provides many more examples. In defending the full deity of Christ in the fourth century, Athanasius of Alexandria was given the nickname ‘Athanasius contra mundum’ (Athanasius against the world). He fell foul of various emperors on five occasions, and spent some seventeen years in exile. This destroyed his chances of appearing in the New Year’s Honours List.

During the last four years of Charles Spurgeon’s life, he was engaged in the bitter Downgrade Controversy where he took a stand against the English Baptist Union which was failing to stand for the full authority of Scripture. It is not as though all the unbelievers were outside the professing Church. On 3 November 1887 *The Christian World* declared: ‘It is a plain and literal fact that those who share the opinions he condemns constitute a very large majority of all thinking Christian people.’ That is the way to do it: paint your opponent as an isolated fool. But who reads *The Christian World* today? Only an historian. And who benefits from reading Spurgeon? Whoever takes up his works and reads them.

No soldier wants to be alone in a battle. Nor are we called upon to be lone wolves who are convinced we are right because everyone is against us. Nevertheless, each must adopt the stance of the apostle Paul: ‘Let God be true though every one were a liar’ (Rom.3:4). The media, the universities, the parliaments, the gurus of modern culture will not have the final say. God will. This is our challenge – to remain faithful. And it is also our comfort, when we have to dare to stand alone. When Elijah cried out: ‘I, even I only, am left’ (1 Kings 19:10, 14), God corrected him (1 Kings 19:18). But when Jehoshaphat heard 400 prophets tell him what wicked King

Ahab wanted to hear, he was rightly suspicious (1 Kings 22:1-23). What matters first is not words of a false peace nor a jaundiced view of life, but the truth of the living God. Standing alone before God, we will be drawn to those who do likewise, eventually making up a multitude which no man can number (Rev.7:9).

*With warm regards in Christ,*  
**– Peter Barnes, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia**

*Mr Peter Barnes is the editor of AP and pastor at Revesby Presbyterian Church NSW.*

## Seeing Jesus in a hostile world

Before his conversion, Paul was much like an Islamist jihadi; he hated Christianity and did all he could to eradicate it. God could have justly destroyed him—as He did with others who persecuted His people. Many (including Paul himself) viewed Paul as the least likely to become a Christian. He describes himself as “near the edge” of unsavable. Had he known the truth and nonetheless gone on to rage against Christ, he might not have been saved: “But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). In his raging persecution of Christians, Paul believed he was doing good, just as many do today.

Considering Paul’s history, it is no wonder that Luke records a stunned response in Damascus as he began to tell others of Christ:

*All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” (Acts 9:21)*

The response in Jerusalem was the same. The disciples of Jesus “were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple” (v. 26).

Why does Paul recount his own salvation in his letter? He wants Timothy to remember how “the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love

that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14). Wonder and worship fill Paul as he thinks about who Jesus is and what He has done. Paul, a persecutor, was transformed and forgiven, filled with faith and love. If this is what Christ can do, Timothy need not be fearful and anxious about the hostility he faces in Ephesus. Jesus Christ is more than sufficient for him and the church in all their needs.

Our Lord’s desire that we share in this confident faith is clear: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (v. 15). This is why our Lord came, and this is what He is still doing: making the dead alive, the evil good, the guilty innocent. He reigns to save, transform, and sanctify. Paul tells us, “I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (v. 16). Paul received patience and mercy so that we would see Jesus. While Paul was pursuing evil, Jesus was pursuing His ministry, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, and the ascension. While Paul was living in evil, Jesus was seated on the throne of glory, working and waiting for the time of Paul’s salvation. After transforming Paul, Jesus continued patiently loving and sanctifying His servant, so that we can know with gladness that this is who our Lord and Savior is, today and forever.

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**There are 50 countries which are monitored by World Watch Monitor for being places where Christians around the world are under pressure for their faith.**

**We will bring you summaries from different countries each issue so that you may be focussed on praying for the needs of Christians' everywhere.**

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### Kyrgyzstan

Starting with the 2005 Tulip revolution, a bloodless overthrow of the communist regime, Kyrgyzstan's democratically elected government is unique in the Central Asia region. Kyrgyzstan is predominantly Muslim – mainly folk Islam in the countryside – but there is increasing radicalisation, with more than 330 Kyrgyz citizens known to have travelled to join the Islamic State group. About 4 per cent of the population is Russian Orthodox, despite large-scale emigration, and there are a growing number of Christian converts from a Muslim background, who face pressure from family, friends and community. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but proposed new laws impose stringent registration rules, while all religious literature must be approved.

### Laos

Christianity is viewed as a “Western ideology” in Laos, and those who adhere to it are considered foreign agents and enemies. The Marxist-Leninist government monitors all churches, and its permission is required for all conversions, evangelism and church activities. Christian converts from Buddhism or animism are seen to bring shame to their community. Several Laotian Christians have faced physical assaults or even expulsion from their communities.

### Lebanon

Complex, besieged and dysfunctional on many levels (it took 29 months to break a deadlock and pick a president), Lebanon

nonetheless is an open society where freedoms of the press, assembly, expression, and religion are protected by law. Since the end of its 15-year civil war in 1990, Christians and Muslims have shared representation in the government. But underneath the relatively stable politics, tensions abound – related to geographic origin, clan identity and religious affiliation. The turmoil in neighbouring Syria exacerbates tensions in Lebanon, which is enduring the burden of an estimated 1 million Syrian refugees. Additionally, an estimated 14,000 Christians from Iraq have sought refuge in Lebanon.

### Libya

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011, Libya has been reduced to chaos, with Islamist groups filling the power vacuum left by the former dictator. It was in Libya in February 2015 that 20 Egyptian Copts and a Ghanaian were beheaded by the Islamic State group. Only a tiny fraction of Libya's estimated 20,000 Christians are Libyans – most are migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. They are allowed to meet in churches, but Libyans are not. Migrants stranded in Libya are vulnerable to pressure and violence; Christian migrants are extra vulnerable.

### Malaysia

Malaysia's Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims, leaving Malays with no choice but to identify as Muslim. They are dominant politically, and benefit from positive discrimination in business, education and the civil service, but a large ethnic Chinese minority holds economic power. The communities coexist in relative harmony, although racial and religious divides persist. Conversion to Christianity is against the law in almost all states, as is evangelism among Malay Muslims. Political, social and religious instability is on the rise, while increasing intolerance towards Chinese, Indian and indigenous tribespeople affects Christians, too, as most belong to these minority groups. Political parties like PAS uphold and protect Islam. Mahathir Mohamad became

prime minister in May 2018 following his shock election victory over the coalition that has ruled the country for six decades since independence from Britain.

### Maldives

The Maldives government claims that every one of its citizens is a Muslim. Migrant Christians are closely monitored and their meetings restricted, while Maldivian converts to Christianity are forced to keep their faith completely secret. Owning a Bible can result in a prison sentence; converting to another religion can lead to loss of citizenship. Some Maldivian Christians have been forced to move abroad.

### Mali

Although Islamists have been dislodged from territory they previously controlled, the legacy of their 2012 takeover has been a more radicalised society that is even less hospitable to Christians than it was before – especially those who have converted to Christianity from Islam. Despite a 2015 peace deal with the government, Islamists continue to pose a threat to Christians (most of whom live in the south), especially in parts of the country that are not controlled by the state. Several Christian missionaries have been kidnapped for ransom in recent years.

### Mauritania

Under military rule for more than 30 years, Mauritania's government tries to shore up its legitimacy among Islamic groups and hold on to power partly by being hostile to Christians – particularly those from a Muslim background. Converts to Christianity also face pressure from their families, as they are seen as bringing shame on their tribal or ethnic group. As a result, most keep their faith a secret.



### Nearly 6,000 congregations depart from the United Methodist Church over the homosexual issue

The following is excerpted from “Nearly 300 churches,” Christian Post, June 15: “Almost 300 congregations in Pennsylvania have left the United Methodist Church due to its internal debate over homosexuality, joining thousands of others across the United States. The UMC Western Pennsylvania Conference voted to ratify the disaffiliation votes of 298 congregations at a special session held in Erie on Wednesday ... . Earlier this week at a gathering held at Ball State University, the UMC Indiana Conference overwhelmingly approved a motion to accept the disaffiliation votes of 174 congregations ... . Over the past several years, the UMC has experienced divisive debate over whether it should change its official stance barring the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex romantic relationships. Many churches, frustrated by the constant debate and the refusal of many UMC leaders to enforce the rules, have decided to leave the mainline Protestant denomination. According to UM News, as of Thursday morning, around 5,800 congregations have left the UMC over the debate, with around 3,800 of that number having disaffiliated thus far this year.

*Way of Life Literature*

### Ireland's March For Life

On Saturday, over 10,000 people joined the march for life in Ireland.

New data from the Irish health minister, Stephen Donnelly, revealed that abortion in the country increased by 27% in 2022 to 8,500 abortions.

Pro-lifers are protesting new legislation that would allow the murder of unborn babies for any reason up to six months of

pregnancy. Lawmakers may also end conscience protections for doctors who refuse to perform abortions.

*theworldview.com*

### Nearly 5 billion people experience severe violations of religious freedom

Aid to the *Church in Need* released their 2023 Religious Freedom in the World report.

Nearly 5 billion people worldwide experience severe violations of religious freedom in 61 countries. The worst persecution occurs in just 28 countries, affecting 4 billion people, or about half of the world's population.

The report noted, “During the period under review, intense persecution became more acute and concentrated, and impunity grew.” Countries with the worst religious liberty violations include Afghanistan, China, India, North Korea, and Nigeria.

### Judge rules in favour of Christian couple imprisoned in Iran

The following is excerpted from “Unusual Ruling Frees Christian Couple,” Morning Star News, May 17, 2023: “Iranian authorities released two Christian leaders from prison last week after a judge broke with common judicial practice in the country and ruled that home church participation was not illegal, sources said. Throwing out a 2020 conviction, a judge in Branch 34 of the Appeals Court in Tehran on May 9 found there was no evidence the couple had violated Iran's national security laws by participating in a home meeting, according to advocacy group Article 18. Homayoun Zhavah, 64, and wife Sara Ahmadi, 45, both converts from Islam, were released later that day. In his ruling, the judge found that belonging to or participating in a ‘home-group’

with people of the same faith was not illegal but ‘natural.’ The acquittal struck down a November 2020 conviction in which Ahmadi, accused of being a house church leader, was sentenced to a total of 11 years in prison for ‘founding or leading an organization that aims to disrupt national security’ and ‘membership in organizations that aim to disrupt national security.’ Iran ranked eighth on Christian support organization Open Doors’ 2023 *World Watch List* (WWL) of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. During the past few years, the government of Iran has severely cracked down on house churches, but the WWL report states, ‘despite great oppression, the Islamic Republic of Iran has seen phenomenal growth in its underground church movement.

*Way of Life Literature*

### Over 50,000 Nigerian Christians have been killed for their faith since 2009: report

**Mon Apr 17, 2023**

NIGERIA (LifeSiteNews) – A new report on the state of Christians in Nigeria is stating that over 50,000 have been killed in the country for their Christian faith since 2009.

In a report issued by the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (Intersociety) on April 10, the plight of Nigerian Christians for over a decade is highlighted. Intersociety, based in Eastern Nigeria, dedicated the report to the “1,041 slain and disappeared victims” of Muslim terrorist groups who had carried out attacks in the first 100 days of 2023.

Summarizing their findings, Intersociety wrote that “since [the] 2009 Islamic uprising[,] 52,250 Christians and 34,000 moderate Muslims have been butchered or hacked to death.” These attacks and murders are being performed not only by terrorist groups, but also by state supporters groups, including the Nigerian army.

The report noted that such attacks had become increasingly regular in recent years, with current president Muhammadu Buhari's regime of "radical Islamism" having killed 30,250 Christians since 2015, and of having attacked 18,000 churches and 2,200 Christian schools.

*Abridged*

## Supreme Court affirms Christian web designer's religious liberty

On Friday, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a landmark ruling in a religious liberty case.

Lorie Smith, a Christian web designer, challenged a Colorado anti-discrimination law. The legislation would have required her to make websites for faux homosexual weddings.

The high court ruled 6-3 in favor of Smith. The majority ruling stated, "No public accommodations law is immune from the demands of the Constitution."

Alliance Defending Freedom noted, "The U.S. Supreme Court rightly reaffirmed that the government can't force Americans to say things they don't believe. The court reiterated that it's unconstitutional for the state to eliminate from the public square ideas it dislikes, including the belief that marriage is the union of husband and wife." *theworldview.com*

## Afghanistan instability caused 3,700 civilian casualties

Ongoing instability in Afghanistan led to 1,095 civilians killed and 2,679 wounded between August 2021 and May 2023, according to a report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

More than 700 of the civilian deaths were caused by improvised explosive devices occurring in public places such as mosques, education centers, and commercial markets. The Islamic State was responsible for over 1,700 of these civilians being killed or injured.

Despite the total collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan government to Taliban forces and an attack perpetrated by ISIS-Khorasan Province that killed 13 U.S.

military personnel, President Joe Biden ordered the U.S. forces to completely withdraw from Afghanistan in August 2021. *theworldview.com*

## Major Christian University to close after losing its accreditation

David Rogers | July 6, 2023

One of the country's leading universities has been forced to close after receiving news that its accreditation has been revoked.

Alliance University has announced that the decision has been made after receiving notification from the body that handles accreditation, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Formerly known as Nyack College, on campus and online education will come to a close August 31. According to Yahoo News, continued financial troubles were cited by Middle States and by Alliance University. When the main campus for Nyack College was closed and put on the market, total debt was already documented in the tens of millions of dollars.

In a statement issued by the organization, it read: "On the afternoon of Monday, June 26, Alliance University received notice from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education that its accreditation is being withdrawn as of December 31, 2023. We were surprised by the Middle States' decision and have worked hard all week to evaluate the different options available to us as an institution.

"The administration learned of Middle States' decision on Monday afternoon, and the Board of Trustees met Tuesday evening and again Thursday afternoon. After carefully evaluating all the options and the current financial situation, the Board has made the difficult decision to wind down on-campus and online educational offerings as of August 31, 2023.

"Alliance University will not offer courses for the Fall semester. This news is a tremendous loss for us who love Alliance University and the people here. We are all grieving."

The organization, which was founded in 1812, has prepared and equipped tens of thousands of men and women to serve Christ around the globe.

The college's current student body,

according to Alliance University, comprises 1,063 undergraduates and 881 graduate students. AU boasts that 45% of its students are the first in their families to attend college. The college has been considered among the most diverse, with graduates coming from more than 90 countries.

According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, the average tuition paid by students is \$22,000 annually; the institution has a 45% graduation rate.

Alliance maintains that it has always been rooted in its commitment to academic excellence and spiritual development. Established as an educational institution of The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), Alliance University has been training men and women for global impact since its inception.

"We have been notified that the Board of Directors for the Christian and Missionary Alliance is exploring the possibility of continuing the Alliance Theological Seminary program. They are considering a number of options," Alliance said. *mychristiandaily.com*

## 400 attacks on Christians in India

United Christian Forum reports Christians in India suffered 400 violent attacks in the first half of this year.

That's nearly double the 274 incidents of persecution during the same period last year.

This year, the attacks occurred in 23 out of 28 states in the country.

David Curry with Global Christian Relief told CBN News, "Regardless of how they frame it, whether its ethnic violence or anarchist, it seems to always be that the Indian government is overlooking and even in some cases encouraging violence against Christians in India."

*theworldview.com*



# New Plymouth Reformed Church Instituted

During this celebratory year, which marks the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of God's faithfulness in establishing the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the New Plymouth Reformed Church rejoiced at becoming an instituted church on May 20. Those who joined in the celebrations came from Palmerston North RC, Whanganui RC, Masterton RC and Pukekohe RC, North Shore RC, and many other churches sent letters of encouragement.

The institution service was conducted by the Rev. Aaron Warner on behalf of the Palmerston North Reformed Church (our mother church). During the service we witnessed the installation of the Rev. Joshua Flinn as the minister of the word and sacraments and two elders, Peter Chapman and Walter Walraven, and deacon, Gary McCracken which constitute the new session.

In 2015 the Reformed Church of Palmerston North became the supervisory Church of the church plant known provisionally as the New Plymouth Reformed Church. A committee had been established to oversee the church plant work which consisted of the Rev's. Michael Flinn, Hans Vaatstra and Elder Peter Mulholland.

In its earliest days the NPRC (New



*This group constitutes the humble beginnings of the New Plymouth Reformed Church back in 2015. Elder Peter Mulholland (rh) was part of the supervisory committee during this time.*



Plymouth Reformed Church) met at the Woodleigh School Hall, and then sometime later moved to conduct services in the Hillsborough Public Hall on 373 Egmont Road. This location is rural, but only 10-20 minutes drive for most people living in New Plymouth and the greater regional area.

As with most church plants, this group started with only a few members to get things moving. With the Lord's blessing we

see this little congregation growing in numbers and maturity. We have a lot to be thankful for. This past Lord's Day (July 16), we witnessed and celebrated the re-affirmation of faith of a couple who had been worshipping with us for some time. By the time you read this, we will also have begun Cadets and GEMS. The Lord is good, and He continues to build His church. **Ed.**



*People came to celebrate with us from as far away as Pukekohe, Masterton, Palmerston North and our closest neighbour Whanganui.*

# New Plymouth Reformed Church Institution May 20, 2023



(Top right). The Rev. Aaron Warner extending the right hand of fellowship to the Rev. Joshua Flinn immediately after his installation.  
(Right). Elder's and Deacon being installed.  
(Top left). Elder's Joshua Couperus (Palmerston North) and Bernie Vaatstra (Whanganui) bringing greetings from their churches.  
(Below right). Elder Nathan Walraven (Pukekohe) and Deacon Derek de Jong (Masterton) bringing greetings from their respective congregations.