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# The New Zealand Story: The Stone-Campbell Movement in New Zealand

LYNDSAY JACOBS

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In 1840, when there were only about 2000 Europeans in New Zealand (called Aotearoa by the indigenous Maori people), the British Crown and the Maori people signed the Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand became a British Crown Colony. The witness of Churches of Christ in New Zealand began in 1844—only four years after the establishment of this new colony.

Churches throughout the nineteenth century British Empire were often established by migrants rather than missionaries. Thomas Jackson, a migrant from Glasgow, Scotland began witnessing in the streets of the newly established city of Nelson in the South Island of New Zealand on March 2, 1844. The first Church of Christ in the Southern Hemisphere was established in Nelson and a plaque outside the Nelson City Church of Christ, located on Rutherford Street, commemorates this event. All churches of the movement in New Zealand subsequently used the name “Churches of Christ”—the name used by the British Churches. Recently the name “Christian Churches New Zealand” was adopted. This was because our movement was being confused with groups unrelated to the Stone-Campbell movement—especially challenging when planting new churches.

Jackson and some of his Nelson converts moved to Auckland (on the North Island) two years later, and were instrumental in commencing the church in that city late in 1845. Jackson’s youngest convert, the twenty-year-old Thomas Magarey, moved to Adelaide where he was responsible for establishing the first Church of Christ in Australia. The third New Zealand Church of Christ was established in Dunedin in 1858 (ten years after that settlement was founded) by members who migrated from Scotland. The arrival of later pioneers from Britain led to the establishment of churches in other centers.

In 1860 a group known as the Nonconformist Settlement Party arrived from Manchester and strengthened the Auckland church. Rattray, a sea captain, sailed his own ship from Scotland, a journey lasting over three months. He brought his family with him and they reinforced the work in Auckland, which soon numbered 140 members. Another sea captain by the name of Stewart, while trading with his ship around the coastal towns of the country, made it his business to meet with and encourage members. In 1868 Captain Stewart met with W. E. Norris in Christchurch, who decided to become a “Christian only” and by 1870 the church opened its first small chapel in Woolston. Stewart also provided help in other places.

In the absence of any trained ministry, the churches were reliant upon the mutual ministry provided by lay people, which characterized the British Churches of Christ. It was not until 1866 that the first full-time minister was employed. The lack of training was offset by the wise use of Christian periodicals and literature, which were obtained from both the British and American churches. When George Taylor arrived from Yorkshire in 1844, he brought with him a large quantity of Christian publications from James Wallis of Nottingham, the editor of the *British Millennial Harbinger*. Regular correspondence with James Wallis and with Alexander Campbell of Bethany, West Virginia, in the United States proved to be an important way of nurturing the young churches. In 1846 Alexander Campbell could rejoice in informing his many

readers around the world that he had received, “Good News from a Far Country,” and devoted two pages in his *Millennial Harbinger* to an account of the establishment and growth of the Churches of Christ in New Zealand.

The arrival of Edward Lewis (my wife’s great grandfather) from Sydney in 1866 marked a turning point in the life of the churches. First called the “boot-maker minister,” it was not long before he was fully employed in working amongst the churches. Edward Lewis became known as the “Grand Old Man” of the New Zealand Churches, and his labors covered areas from North Auckland to Dunedin. He was responsible for planting a number of churches and strengthening others. The first published record of the churches in 1885 stated that there were twenty-five established churches with a membership of 1,238. Only thirteen churches had their own buildings and Lewis was the only full-time evangelist.

By the 1880s, the movement shifted from a pioneering stage to a period of growth and cooperation. This transition was brought about largely by the arrival of new leaders who came from the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia. M. W. Green came from England; Chas Watt and D. W. McCrackett from Scotland. H. S. Earl, an Englishman trained by Alexander Campbell in the United States, was an outstanding evangelist. Earl and A. B. Maston of the United States brought new life and vision to the churches. From Australia came the preachers Clapham, Turner, Hales, Bates, Greenhill, Bull and Franklyn. All of these played an important part in building up the struggling churches.

Further evidence of growth was the setting up of three District Conferences to provide a means of cooperation and to promote the work on a more organized basis. These Conferences, covering Auckland District, Middle District (Wellington and Nelson) and Southern District (Westland, Canterbury, Otago and Southland), now assumed responsibility for the employment and placement of ministers. A move for even greater cooperation was taken with the formation of the first Dominion (national) Conference in 1901, when an all male gathering of thirty-six delegates met in Wellington. From 1920 onward, the Dominion Conferences were held annually, making it possible to coordinate the outreach programs of the churches and put in operation organized structures for “Brotherhood” activities. By 1905 there were 2463 members in fifty churches.

Our movement was established in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1901 by John Sheriff of New Zealand. In 1904, the New Zealand Conference agreed to take over this mission, and Mr. and Mrs. F. L. Hadfield were sent as the first missionaries. They arrived in Bulawayo in 1906. Southern Rhodesia became a major dimension in the life of the New Zealand Churches and has proved to be a very valuable sphere of Christian witness. The Associated Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe, now completely controlled by indigenous leadership, are many times larger than the current New Zealand fellowship. The consecrated service of many devoted workers (including the lifelong ministry of Sir Garfield and Lady Todd) has been a source of inspiration, and a major contribution of the New Zealand churches, to world mission. B. J. (Bafundi) Mpfu of Bulawayo is the current president (2008–2012) of the World Convention of our movement.

The Annual Conferences provided opportunities for stimulus and inspiration and enabled the churches to work together in home mission projects, ministerial training, Christian education, ecumenical affairs, women’s work, examining public issues and in the production of a monthly national paper, *The New Zealand Christian*. The Conference also set up a Preachers’ Provident Fund to aid retired ministers, and established a Church Extension and Property Trust Board that, by an Act of the New Zealand Parliament (1929), serves as a trustee and safeguard for local church properties. These properties are completely under the control of the local church, but if the church should close or leave the association, then the properties become an asset of the board. Membership was given a huge boost by the eighteen-month Hinrichsen-Morris-Brooker missions (1,617 decisions) and growth continued steadily after their departure for Australia in 1931. In 1938 the membership of the churches in New Zealand reached 4,962—the highest on record.

In 1927 the College of the Bible was established. “Glen Leith” (this property was purchased in 1930 and the college transferred there) served the churches in educating men and women for ministry until 1971. A. L. Haddon was founding principal and continued in that position until his sudden death in the South Dunedin church in 1961, just as he finished his sermon. He was succeeded by G. D. Munro. Prior to this establishment of ministerial training in New Zealand, more than thirty of the most prominent young men from the churches went to the United States of America to train for ministry, but very few returned to serve in their homeland. At the time of the College’s closure, almost all churches were served by Glen Leith graduates. A. L. Haddon was a recognized leader in the ecumenical movement in New Zealand and scholar in the worldwide fellowship of Churches of Christ. He was also editor of *The New Zealand Christian* for twenty-four years.

Churches of Christ in New Zealand were represented at the first World Convention of Churches of Christ in 1930 and have been represented at every convention since. They hosted the convention in Auckland in 1988, when I was president. Our New Zealand churches have always been strongly involved in encouraging the global unity of our movement. They also became foundation members of the global Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council in 1975.

The movement towards a united church in New Zealand was a major factor in the life of the churches in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, Churches of Christ had held discussions with the Baptists but it was not possible to bring these to any practical conclusion. In 1955 Churches of Christ became members of the Joint Commission on Church Union which had been set up by the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. (The Anglican Church made a fifth partner at a later date.) In 1957 Churches of Christ voted 75% in favor and 6% against the principle of church union.

When the “Plan for Union” was presented for adoption in 1972, support within the churches was much more evenly divided, with 55% voting in favor and 45% voting against. Feelings were also more strongly “for” and “against” than earlier. Because of the negative vote of the House of Bishops of the Anglican Church, the united church was not established. However, twelve of the currently affiliated Churches of Christ are in “union parishes” or “cooperative ventures.” These Church of Christ congregations have united their local witness with congregations of the partner churches. Union parishes and cooperative ventures (uniting congregations) share in the Forum of the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ). Through UCANZ all uniting congregations are able to discover their unique calling while they continue to participate in their traditional church families.

Churches of Christ members have contributed a great deal to the wider church—locally, nationally and internationally. They were foundation members of the National Council of Churches in New Zealand and the World Council of Churches, both established in the 1940s. Ron O’Grady, a Churches of Christ Minister, was Associate General Secretary of the National Council of Churches for several years before he became Associate General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia. Barbara Stephens served as the executive director of Christian World Service in New Zealand. Althea Campbell has served as a Christian World Service staff member for many years and continues to do so. Many have served as chaplains and provided leadership for groups such as the Bible Society and the Leprosy Mission. Not all churches wanted to become members of the new ecumenical body that replaced the National Council in the 1980s, so Churches of Christ became an Associate Member of the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ). Each congregation decided annually whether it wished to be associated with this membership. In 2005 the CCANZ was disestablished and an appropriate new means of ecumenical cooperation is still being sought. There is a tremendous amount of cooperation nationally and locally, but a way of establishing overarching coordination is proving to be elusive.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a considerable influx of ministers from the United States of America. These were mainly from Christian Churches/Churches of Christ working with congregations that did not favor the planned union. The number currently varies but is small—sometimes none at all. Although most churches are now served by New Zealanders, the closing of the College of the Bible at Glen Leith has led to these ministers coming from a very diverse ministerial educational background.

The steady decline in membership in the second half of the twentieth century, to about 1,800 now, meant that the Association had less finance and personnel for national committees and programs. Structures were simplified. Responsibility for national affairs between biennial conferences is now in the hands of a small elected Leadership Team with individuals or small groups responsible for cooperative efforts such as overseas mission and ecumenical affairs. Beginning in 2002, *The New Zealand Christian* became an online only publication, and in 2006 was replaced by a monthly electronic newsletter.

New Zealand has also been sharing with the Australian Churches of Christ and the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the United Kingdom with a focus on making churches more effective. Earlier, cooperation with the Australian Churches of Christ Overseas Mission Board had led to New Zealand sharing in the Australian support of the churches in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu, and to Australia becoming involved in the strong New Zealand mission work in Zimbabwe.

A number of the churches have grown in recent years (the largest with an attendance of close to 1,000) and new congregations have been established in Auckland and Christchurch. There has been a very strong focus on church planting and renewal. The total number of congregations is about forty.

Christian Churches/Churches of Christ in the United States have recently established a very successful congregation on the north shore of Auckland (Shore Community) and plans are in place to establish a second congregation in 2009.

Although there were a few isolated *a cappella* Churches of Christ members in New Zealand in the first half of the twentieth century, this separate fellowship really re-established itself in the 1950s with small congregations in Auckland, Wellington and Nelson. Considerable help has been given by missionary families from the United States. This fellowship never split from our movement in New Zealand but rather has developed separately. *A cappella* membership today is a little over 1,000 in approximately twenty-five congregations. The South Pacific Bible College is well established in Tauranga, the city that also has the largest congregation.

During the past twenty-five years, a greater appreciation for unity-in-diversity has developed, and there is probably a greater sense of togetherness than there has been for fifty years. It appears that a new era may have begun.

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