

encounter

Introducing Laidlaw's Leadership Team

With the return to Australia of Principal Rod Thompson, our two Heads of School have been appointed co-chairs of the Senior Leadership Team for 2016. Stephen Garner is Head of the School of Theology, and Nigel Smith, Head of the School of Social Practice. Graham Burt, Chair of the National Governing Council (NGC), is operating as Executive Chair.

The Appointments Committee will undertake a further Principal Search, with the goal of an appointment towards the end of 2016.

The co-chair role is not a 'holding pattern' appointment. Rather, this decision was taken by the NGC to allow strategies already in place to continue with ease, as well as the development and implementation of new initiatives already under discussion.

We are pleased with a larger intake of new students this semester than we have seen in recent years and anticipate building on this in the year ahead. We look forward to seeing the contributions from our highly skilled management team - ably led by Nigel and Stephen - come to fruition, building on the superb platform established by Rod Thompson.



Nigel Smith and Stephen Garner

Nigel joined the teaching staff in the School of Education in 2012, before taking on the role of Head of the School of Social Practice in late 2014 when teacher education and counselling converged into one School. He previously worked as a research coordinator at AUT University, and has taught history, psychology and theory of knowledge in K-12 schools in NZ and the Philippines. His research interests include the centrality of relationship to effective teaching and learning, with a particular focus on the use of technology. He is also interested in justice issues in cross cultural encounters, the impact of the internet on society, and integral spiritual growth. He has been involved in creative ministries and leadership in a variety of churches and currently attends Cityside Baptist. Nigel lives in West Auckland, is married to Joanna and has three daughters.

Stephen is a former student of this College, graduating with a Bachelor of Divinity in 2001 before going on to complete a PhD from the University of Auckland looking at Christian responses to new technologies. A central theme to Stephen's research and teaching is that theology must engage with the everyday communities we find ourselves in, seeking to offer something distinctly gospel to church and world. Prior to joining the Laidlaw faculty in 2014, Stephen was involved with theological education in a range of places including Carey Baptist College, Laidlaw's Centre for Distance Learning, Good Shepherd College, and the University of Auckland's School of Theology. Stephen, wife Kim and four children live in West Auckland and attend Massey Presbyterian Church.

Taking Root in Manukau

Our first graduates from Laidlaw's new Manukau campus crossed the stage in December to receive their certificates and diplomas. One of the eight who graduated was Mehi Akauola, awarded a Diploma in Christian Studies.

Just out of her teen years, with high school behind her and a university course started and then stopped, Mehi was at a self-seeking time in her life. Keen to discover her own identity in God, she felt studying at a Bible college would both help her find herself and strengthen her relationship with God. Deciding on Laidlaw College was a no-brainer – her parents are Bible College of New Zealand alumni and her uncle was a



Mehi Akauola

teacher in the Tongan language stream run by the College for a number of years.

Discovering there was a Manukau campus was a bonus – a much easier commute from her home in South Auckland than heading out West. She loved her year of study, particularly enjoying the spiritual formation paper. Her studies did shape her, she had

experiences she never would have got if she hadn't taken the plunge into theological study, and she's feeling better equipped to be a youth leader in her church. Lessons she learned have even helped her stay calm when dealing with difficult clients in her current job as a call centre representative. And from someone who never really saw herself as a student – she's carrying on with more Laidlaw study, taking a paper per semester by distance.

We hope to see more stories of lives shaped and faith strengthened as the Manukau campus continues to grow. From a starting point of 20 students in July 2014 to just over 60 enrolled this semester, it's exciting to see the vision of extending the reach of Laidlaw into the heart of the South Auckland community starting to be realised.

A New Partnership

2016 has seen a new partnership between the Anglican Church and Laidlaw College come to fruition. The Anglican Youth Ministry Qualification is now being offered through Laidlaw's Bachelor of Ministries degree. Students spend 8-10 hours a week in youth ministry in an Anglican parish, take papers at Laidlaw, and complete Anglican studies through regional courses, block courses or summer schools run by St John's or Bishopdale Theological Colleges.

It's a genuine partnership - the National Youth Advisor for the Anglican Church (Tikanga Pakeha), Phil Trotter, is teaching Laidlaw's youth ministry block course

next month. Classes will be taught at Laidlaw's Christchurch campus and video linked to Auckland. Phil has been involved in youth ministry for over 30 years, and his expertise is also being called upon to assist Laidlaw in reviewing its youth ministry offerings.

This partnership is designed to build sustainable youth ministry within the Anglican context. The Anglican Church has provided scholarships to assist with course fees. One scholarship recipient, Josh Olds, is studying a paper this semester at Laidlaw's Christchurch campus while working 18 hours as youth pastor for St Timothy's Anglican Church and 15 hours as a banking consultant. Weeks into his *Introduction to the New Testament* paper he's enthusiastic about the course, finding the lectures stimulating and enjoying interacting with the Laidlaw community. He sees himself involved in youth ministry



Phil Trotter

"one way or another for a long time"! Which is exactly the kind of sentiment the Anglican Church would love to hear repeated by all who take this qualification.

For more information about this course contact Phil Trotter, phil@anglicanyouth.org.nz or Stephen Garner, sgarner@laidlaw.ac.nz

New Missions Appointment

Nigel Webb, Director of SIM NZ, has been appointed Laidlaw College's Missions Enabler for 2016. Seconded from SIM on a part-time basis, Nigel's role involves both teaching and tutoring, mentoring students with an interest in missions, reviewing Laidlaw's mission offerings and interfacing with the missions community.

Nigel is an alumni of the College, completing a Diploma for Graduates in 1998, before spending eight years in Ecuador with wife Richelle and sons Caleb and Isaac. Nigel's key role was setting up and facilitating a Theological Education by Extension programme for a house church movement of over 100



Nigel Webb

churches. He also worked alongside a movement to mobilise Ecuadorians into overseas mission. The Webbs arrived back in NZ earlier than anticipated, after Nigel was invited to come back and fill the role of SIM's New Zealand Director. This is a year of transition as Nigel eases himself out of that role and mentors a new director.

While juggling all the varied responsibilities of a Missions Director, Nigel also successfully completed a Master of Theology with merit at Laidlaw, graduating last December.

After a hiatus in having a dedicated Missions lecturer on staff, the College is delighted to have someone with Nigel's experience and vision to help others find their place in the mission of God. Since its inception in 1922 as the Bible Training Institute, the College has a long history of graduates serving God in the overseas mission field. We trust that this appointment will both increase the profile of missions among the student body and strengthen our heritage of graduates serving God in His mission throughout the world.

Thinking Theologically

Jenny Mackie |
Student Dean/Alumni Coordinator
(BCNZ graduate 1996 - who did manage to pass her theology papers!)

"What's theology?" I was asked as I took a group of new students on an orientation tour through the School of Theology offices at the Henderson campus. A fair question I thought. It's not a word you'll find in the Bible or weekly sermon. Yet the study of God and his relation to the world is at the very heart of what we teach at Laidlaw. It's crucial that our students learn to think theologically - and to that end we have introduced a new entry level course designed for theology, counselling and education students, *Beginning Theology: Learning to Think Theologically*.

The course covers skills in handling the Bible, gives a taster of systematic theology and ethics and will finish with an integrative project to wrap it all up. It's designed to give students confidence in thinking theologically and to help them join the dots between theology and other vocations.



Beginning Theology students at Henderson and Manukau (by videoconference on TV screen)

Using video link technology, the class is taught simultaneously to 70 students by lecturer Stephen Garner at Henderson and Manukau, with Stephen alternating his face-to-face teaching each week between the two campuses.

During a break in the midst of discussing creeds, I asked a number of students how they were finding the course.

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"It's making me think about things I haven't thought of before. I'm looking at things through a different lens."

"It allows me to go into more depth. I'm not just playing in the kiddie pool."

"I've been to church for many years and heard the same scriptures and the same words, but here it's totally different. I'm going deep."

I recall wading through an inches thick "introduction to theology" textbook in my days as a student, with a dictionary beside me. While the God we study is the same today as he was in my student days, this course is easing students into learning to think theologically. For some students, those thick textbooks await as they progress in their studies but the journey ahead won't be as daunting thanks to the skills taught in this course!

Joy and Suffering

Dr Mark Keown
Senior Lecturer - School of Theology

After hearing an excellent sermon on suffering and joy from James 1, I was chatting with the preacher and suggested there are two equal and opposite dangers or extremes where suffering and joy are concerned.

On the one hand we can end up with a theology that lacks any real space for the reality of suffering. Becoming a Christian kind of means that your life will get gloriously better, you will get healed if you have enough faith, your financial problems will dry up if you are obedient and generous (especially tithing), and somehow you will not suffer like the rest of humanity. Some look with suspicion at others who suffer and don't experience release. What have they done wrong? Do they lack faith? God is in some sense angry with them. For the one suffering, this can lead to great self-recrimination, anger at God, and even giving up on the Christian faith. This kind of belief can perhaps be found in some Pentecostal, charismatic, and prosperity expressions of the faith. This type of faith expression does not deal well with the reality of suffering that all people, Christians included, face. It does recognise joy and God's intervention, but can tip the balance too far that way.

On the other hand, there is a kind of Christianity where the reality of suffering is recognised. You should



expect it. All humanity experiences it. In some representations of it, you end up almost celebrating it. Often it leads to a low expectation of God's intervention. There can be a fatalistic resignation to it. Prayer for healing lacks expectation. Being miserable in suffering can become the norm. When someone is buoyant with belief in God's power to intervene, they are looked on with suspicion. Joy becomes uncool with excessive optimism and expressions of celebration treated with misgiving. This kind of Christianity can perhaps be found among conservatives, those with a reformed outlook, evangelicals, or those who are reacting against the more optimistic expressions of the faith. The preacher I heard suggested that this is a kind of "poverty gospel," whereby poverty and suffering are celebrated states. I thought that was an interesting expression.

So how do we walk in the tension or dialectic between joy and suffering? Paul somehow finds a way to do this in Philippians. He is in a dangerous spot. He is in chains in a Roman prison, facing a trial and potential capital punishment. He has had a life of suffering (eg. 2 Cor 11-12). He is concerned for

the Philippians who are seriously threatened from opposition, Judaizers, and others, and are suffering. They are also facing a unity crisis. Paul acknowledges his suffering as real, he may die (Phil 1:19-26). He yearns to experience the fullness of life in Christ including fellowship in his suffering and conforming to his death (Phil 3:10). Yet, he can also rejoice. Sixteen times in the letter he speaks of joy, summing it up with "rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice" (Phil 4:4). He still trusts in God's intervention for him to get out through prayer and the Spirit (Phil 1:19, 25-26). Yet, he is real about suffering, death is coming, it is gain, but as he lives on, God will be with him in and through it.

One of our challenges is to find that space between these two extremes and be people of joy in the midst of suffering. We must avoid falling into either mistake. That is a great challenge.

This article first appeared as a blog on Laidlaw's website. For other blogs from Laidlaw staff check out www.laidlaw.ac.nz

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