



TCF ... An Historical Perspective

At the AGM held in June 2001 there was a request for an article in TCF News outlining the history of TCF in NSW. The article which follows includes some excerpts and summary from the document *Some Observations on the History and the Prospects of the Teachers Christian Fellowship of New South Wales* by Win Dunkley in 1989.

Background

The Teachers Christian Fellowship (TCF) should be seen as part of the movement which was taking place from the late 1920's on, in many parts of Australia. It included the formation of the Evangelical Unions in the Universities, the Crusader Union in Independent Schools, and the Inter Schools Christian Fellowship in the public schools generally.

The young people who formed the backbone of these organisations were often involved in Scripture Union also. In the liberal theological climate of the day, S.U. had a long-standing reputation for promoting Bible-based teaching and evangelistic outreach, which attracted those who were committed to these things themselves.

It should be borne in mind that the same body of people tended to be involved in all the related bodies, taking varying roles as occasion arose, in SU, EU, ISCF, TCF and so on.

January, 1935 was a crucial time for the development of the movement in NSW.

The first of the Varsities and All Schools Camps, under SU auspices, was held at Katoomba, for secondary school girls. At this camp, the need for what became the ISCF, became evident.

A number of young Christian teachers and Teachers College students attended a houseparty, also at Katoomba, during the annual Christian Convention. They met daily for prayer, for the country areas of NSW, which were then a spiritual desert, in particular. Many of those present were going out in to the schools in 1935, though in that Depression year, there was no certainty of employment. By the end of first term, they were scattered to all parts of the State, no two of them together, and were seeking to witness for Christ, having been sent, as they believed, by His appointment, to meet something of the need for which they had prayed.

Beginnings

A meeting at 'Culverden', Katoomba (now the site of the CMS Conference Centre) of those involved in the camp/houseparty, resolved to venture on the setting up of the school groups under the name "Inter School Christian

Fellowship". Within a few weeks of the beginning of first term, several meetings for High School pupils had begun, at this stage outside the schools themselves. Both boys' and girls' groups were commenced, and those who initiated the idea were involved in their promotion and oversight. Vincent Craven, then secretary of SU, saw the wisdom of the ISCF being under the SU 'umbrella', where it continued.

The then Girls' Staffworker of SU, Miss Heather Drummond, herself a teacher, saw the need also for a teachers' group, and called a meeting of interested teachers. As a result, in **June 1935**, the Teachers' Christian Fellowship of New South Wales was formally set up. (Similar fellowships already existed in Tasmania and Victoria, with which Heather was acquainted.

Basis and Aims

The purpose of the Fellowship was to link together Christian teachers, to strengthen one another in prayer and fellowship, in their witness for Christ. Its basis was acceptance of the Bible as authoritative for faith and practice; and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord and God, on the part of members. Members undertook to study the Bible and pray regularly, and to recognise their responsibility to provide means for carrying on the work.

1935-1945

A fellowship must have some corporate activities if it is to be anything more than a name.

Houseparties were a feature of the work at a time when it would have been impossible for most members to meet other than in school holidays, apart from the group in the city. This met monthly, to hear a speaker or for a Bible study. The outline of this was circulated in a monthly newsletter which went to all members, and was welcomed especially by those in country areas. It should be noted that it was rare before 1946 for two members to be located close to one another, and for members to have their own transport.

Members in the country in particular had little access to resources of spiritual and professional help which we now tend to take for granted. TCF's lending library was designed to help fill the gap - books were posted out to those requesting them.

Involvement in the formation and supervision of ISCF groups, both in and out of school, and in holiday camps for school pupils, both Primary and Secondary, was characteristic of members.

Prayer for one another was also strongly emphasised. Most of the members were linked in groups of about 7, who corresponded with one another and prayed for one another regularly. Some groups continued for as much as thirty years!!

Involvement in Evangelistic Outreach: Life with a Capital L campaigns were one answer to the spiritual barrenness of the country areas. These were held in various areas of NSW during the 30's. They were undertaken by teams made from SU, the EU's, Crusader Union and the Nurses' Christian Movement, and were an all out evangelistic thrust in the district, usually in university and college vacations but overlapping with school terms so that the school population could be reached. TCF members took an active part, both in the preparation and follow up, when there was such a campaign in their area.

Membership

By 1945 the number of committed Christians in the teaching profession was growing, partly as a result of pupils seeing through Christian teachers the possibilities of education as a sphere of usefulness for God. TCF membership had grown from the initial 15 in 1935 to about 250 in 1945, mainly through Individual members introducing others, and through SU staffworkers who were alert to the needs of teachers.

Post World War 2 Growth and Developments

During the late 40's TCF in NSW had been asked to undertake responsibility for the oversight and encouragement of the student groups in Teachers Colleges.

As the membership grew, the possibility of a number of TCF groups where several members might get together for mutual help and evangelistic outreach, became apparent. One of the tasks of the General Secretary was to visit members in country areas and encourage them to form such groups. For well over a year this was a matter of earnest prayer, but there seemed to be no response to the suggestion. Then, quite suddenly, several groups sprang into being in one year. and local groups began.

A willingness to pioneer saw TCF arrange annual Teacher's Services with a definite aim to present the gospel to teachers who might be encouraged to attend. In 1947, when no- one else appeared to be offering training, TCF held a series of lectures for RI teachers.

TCF placed emphasis on the possibility of its members being called to missionary service further afield. TCF members at home sought to uphold those who went out by prayer, friendship and gifts.

Conferences and seminars were concerned with members professional needs. The subject of discipline, the problems of coping with the needs of the slow learner and of the handicapped child, the question of mental health, were among the matters studied. TCF sought to arrange help for members who might have personal problems - a Teachers' Advisory Board was set up. SU Staffworkers continued to link up teachers with TCF, and to visit those in country towns on their travels.. Christian teachers were encouraged to

consider SU/ISCF work.

A decision was made in January, 1948 to hold an interstate TCF Conference the following January. Meantime, much work was put in by NSW members in drawing up a constitution for the new interstate body, ATCF, in consultation with TCFs in other States. The main areas of activity were the publication of the Journal of Christian Education; arranging an annual interstate conference for teachers; the publication of literature other than the Journal; appointment of staffworkers (at this stage in consultation with IVF /AFES), and maintaining contact with other bodies such as AFES & overseas TCFs.

Over the years the integration of A TCF with AFES/ IVF impacted on TCF in various ways, (too complicated to mention here - editor).

Further Developments

- ∞ In 1960, first paid office secretary appointed as the work became too big for honorary secretary of the NSW work. (Membership was 600-700).
- ∞ A specialist group was formed to arrange functions to cater for the needs of Christian teachers in Independent Schools.
- ∞ A. tape library was set up from which Individuals or groups could borrow and the general library was built up,
- ∞ 8 Prayer groups were commenced in preparation or the Billy graham Crusade in 1959. Many TCF members were actively involved in the Crusade and TCF organised a series of follow up meetings for teachers. Some new members came into the Fellowship. This occurred similarly in 1979.
- ∞ By the end of 1963 there were 16 groups and the formation of specialist groups of technical teachers and lecturers in Universities and Teachers Colleges was being undertaken.
- ∞ Regional Conferences were being arranged by TCF groups in some areas.
- ∞ TCF was a 'Christian voice' on professional subjects as the need arose by way of submissions and papers to appropriate bodies.
- ∞ In 1963, the possibility of work am'ongst overseas teachers studying in Australia opened up. There was an annual influx of teachers from a variety of countries, coming to Sydney for a course on the teaching of English as a Foreign Language, in which Sydney university offered a diploma. TCF took up the challenge of showing hospitality to these teachers, and for some 19 years made a great and valued effort to contact, entertain and befriend these students. Some wee Christians, glad of the opportunity of fellowship. At least one of these returned to start a TCF in her own country. others were to be informed of what the Fellowship stood for. All were returning to positions of influence and leadership in their own country. The impact world-wide is quite incalculable.

1976-1989

Early in 1976, after a difficult 20 years, it was resolved to 'de-integrate' A TCF from AFES. These years could perhaps best be described as years of steady continuance along lines worked out from experience. There were varied activities, some designed for outreach by the members as a group, others

were designed for the support and development of members in their professional lives as well as regular publications of TCF News. The number of local groups increased and this work continued to be a vital part of TCF's ministry. Conferences were held annually. A significant move in the mid 80's was the appointment of a travelling staff worker for TCF NSW, in co-operation with Scripture Union.

(Editor's note - The article concludes with the following quote. Remember it was written in 1989!!)

The picture over the years is one of steady output in one form or another, against a background of difficulty and it ought perhaps to be said, of a need for review of the work such as now appears so evident.

There has been a breakdown in communications and a decline in membership which have rightly alarmed, and discouraged the Executive Committee.

In the mercy of God it appears that these latter are being overcome. However, it would seem in the light of our history as outlined, that there is great need at present for taking stock of the situation, and a new forward move, taking into account the lessons which should have been learned from the experience of years.