

**40TH
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION**

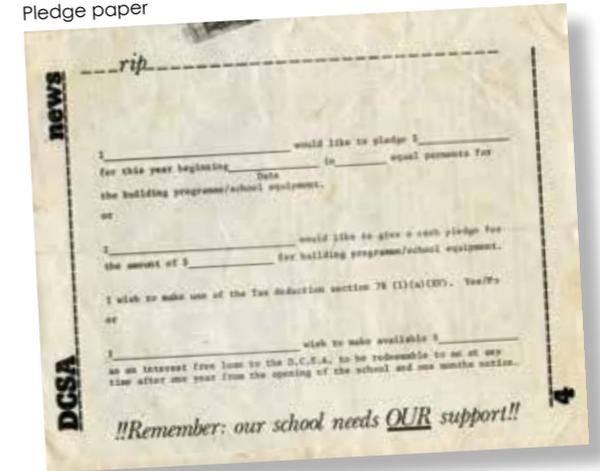
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The first dedication service



Pledge paper



40 Years of Christian Education in the Northern Territory

This year marked 40 years since NT Christian Schools was founded as the Darwin Christian School Association, incorporated on the 16th June 1977. Since that time, the organisation has grown and changed in form, but the vision for Christian education shaped by the gospel has endured.

In this special anniversary edition of the company annual report, we seek to honour some of the people who were heavily involved in the early days of establishing and maturing the vision and mission of the organisation. These first-person narratives describe the Lord's faithfulness in those early years, the

biblically-informed Christian worldview on which the organisation is built.

The current generation of members and staff are responsible for ensuring the vision is protected, preserved and perpetuated. We must collectively guard against being a generation who does not know the Lord or remember the things He has done (Judges 2:10). Therefore, we share these stories in order to remember the Lord's faithfulness and the things He has done in Christian education in the Northern Territory over the past 40 years.

To God be the glory!

Ron Wright

It might be 40 years ago, but Ron Wright is still moved to tears every time he remembers God's goodness in bringing NT Christian Schools from a humble idea to an organisation that manages seven schools across the Territory.

"I am likely to get emotional a few times here," he warns as he sits back in his chair.

He glances to his left to regain his composure, takes a couple of seconds and a deep breath.

"You could probably blame Cyclone Tracy," he continues. "Because after Tracy there was virtually no education in town."

Forty years ago Ron was part of a small group of Christian parents who came together with a vision. They wanted to see a school established in Darwin that would educate, train and care for students based on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"About March or April, the government schools started to reopen... and somebody – and I can't remember his name – from SIL who had been involved in education in America said, 'perhaps we could have a Christian school in Darwin'."

As the idea gained momentum, it became obvious that one church would struggle to operate a school by itself. Achievement was going to require people from all churches – Anglican, Baptist, Uniting and AOG – to come together to say, "there is only one God, there is only one Saviour" and we are going to glorify him in this.

So united in spirit, the parents formed a steering committee and set out to determine the level of community interest for a Christian school.

Some were not so enthusiastic. One man who had established a school in Tasmania stood up during a meeting and told the committee it had "no idea" how difficult this process was and that there was "no way" it was going to succeed.

But the committee pushed forward and by 1977 the Darwin Christian Schools Association was formally incorporated. It had 34 members and a board of directors, but no classrooms, no teachers and most importantly, no land.

"We put in an application with the government, proved our bona fides... and we were offered a block of land on McMillians road."

Unfortunately it was covered in about 50mm of water.

"As our feet sank into the mud, so our hearts sank into the mud with it. We thought how on earth could we ever establish a school in a swamp. We didn't even get around the boundary because it was absolutely impossible with the water."

The government then offered the Association Carpentaria College (now Kormilda). But with only a few hundred dollars in the bank, the Association could not afford to repair the buildings extensively damaged by Cyclone Tracy.

Board member, Keith Hart had another idea.

He knew the Anglican Church owned a block of land on the corner of McMillians Road and Amy Johnson Drive, which had been earmarked for an Anglican Grammar School.

With nothing to lose, the Association approached the Church to ask if it would be prepared to surrender the title to the land. Sympathetic to the cause, the Anglican Church said yes.

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Ron Wright

far left: Ron Wright



Eager to make up for lost time, working bees were organised every Saturday morning and in only a couple of months the land had been cleared, grass had been planted, four donated demountable classrooms were in place and a toilet block had been built.

With 42 enrolments, one principal and several teachers, Marrara Christian School could now officially open.

Over the next three to four years, a shade shelter and more classrooms were added and the school “really mushroomed”.

“It went up to 750 kids over about three or four years”.

With one school now established and development in the Palmerston area progressing quickly, the Association began praying about expansion.

Some “very forward-thinking” board members suggested that while a school at Palmerston was needed, the Association should be prepared for a much broader future.

“We amended the constitution to make it Northern Territory Christian Schools Association and Palmerston Christian School was founded.”

Two years later Alice Springs Christian Academy or Araluen was brought into the association, followed by Litchfield Christian School (now Sattler Christian College) and Nhulunbuy Christian School.

“Nhulunbuy was a thriving mining centre and at that stage, there were a number of pilots with the missionary aviation fellowship who wanted their kids to go to a Christian school.”

In 2002 Woolanang Christian College joined the Association, followed by Gawa Christian School and last but not least, Maparu. In 2013 the Association became a public company, changing its name to NT Christian Schools.

Ron says while there have been up and downs over the years, prayer and faithfulness have been the key to its success.

“It is very important in a Christian school to have staff that are Christian,” he says.

“There have been assaults over the years, where people have said ‘I want to be on the board but I am not a Christian’... We’ve also come under attack from the Equal Rights Commission.”

But with legislation on its side and God’s hand on the process, the gospel has remained at the heart of NT Christian Schools throughout its 40 years.

“Prayer has been central to everything,” says Ron.

While Ron continues to pray for NT Christian Schools, his hope is that God will provide opportunities for more remote schools to join the organisation in the future.

“I am not suggesting we say, next year we will open 20 schools in remote communities, even I don’t have the vision for that.

“But I do have the vision that an association this size could seriously look at another school, another year, another school, another year, another school, another year.”

As he thinks about future possibilities and of the lives that could be changed, tears fill his eyes once more.

“The early years are now bearing fruit.

“I like to think that there are a lot of good plums and apricots and coconuts that I will never see. But they are there and one day, somebody will harvest those.”

“I’m grateful I’ve been involved in [NT Christian Schools] over so many years and seen it grow from one little building in the middle of a paddock to something that’s just unbelievable now. We never would have thought we’d have seven schools,” he says.

Richard Hart

Richard Hart

Richard Hart knows 40 years is a long time, but admits has never found a reason to leave.

“I have always had a heart for this place,” says NT Christian Schools’ longest serving staff member.

“My time at Marrara is getting close to 38 years or something like that and yet for me, it is just as exciting as yesterday and those early days.”

Those early days began in the mid 1970s, when Richard and his dad Keith attended community meetings organised to raise support for an idea; a Christian school in Darwin.

Keith and his wife were missionaries who still had one school-aged son, while Richard was a teacher at Nightcliff High School.

Keen to see a school where education was grounded in biblical principle, both men happily jumped on board to get the project underway.

In 1977, when Darwin Christian Schools Association was formally incorporated, both Keith and Richard were appointed directors.

“My dad was always keen in getting involved in projects and seeing new things developed, so he got involved with the first board. I was there for about a year, he was probably there for about four or five years.”

Richard says while his dad was also heavily involved in helping develop the physical side of the school, one of his greatest strengths was he was a man of prayer.

“He always covered every situation with prayer... He took everything to the Lord and in many of those early

days, prayer was certainly a powerful weapon.”

Fellow founding member, board director and close friend, Ron Wright remembers his time with Keith fondly. He says Keith was one of the Association’s best workers in those early years.

“[Keith] wanted this school to go ahead because he had to send a number of his children off to boarding school to get an education.

“He knew the wrench it was on families to send children away and so even though he only had one child still at school, he decided this was something the whole community needed.”

Ron says Keith played a major role in finding a location for Marrara Christian School. When the original block of land offered by the government was found to be flood prone, Keith suggested approaching the Anglican Church, as it had a vacant block on McMillians Road.

“We had a look at this land and it seemed a lot better because it wasn’t under water.”

Fortunately the Anglican church was open to the idea of transferring the title for the land and Darwin Christian Schools Association had a location for their school.

While Keith, Ron and others were organising land, Richard and the members of the education committee began looking at different approaches to Christian learning.

“We wanted a school where Christ was central and where there were opportunities in everything we did to see how God was involved.

“How did we express that in those early years? I am not we were ever successful but we did give kids,



"I feel extremely privileged to have been chosen to be one of the first teachers and to have had a continuing relationship with the school over the years. I have had the opportunity to work alongside many amazing people who love the Lord and seek to do His will. Prior to this, my spiritual life had been very separate from my school life, but now I could freely talk to my children about God, in fact it was my job. What a joy it was to listen to my little ones pray. They knew God could do anything, that he loved them and was very interested in every little detail of their lives."

Lyn Hart



above: Lyn Hart

parents and staff the opportunity to share their faith, to pray together, to share the issues that were really front and centre."

Richard believes one of the secrets to the long-term strength of NT Christian School is its insistence employees profess Jesus Christ as Lord.

"I know over the years we've had many people who wanted to be involved but they couldn't or wouldn't express an understanding of who Christ was in their life... but this is vitally important because it gives you common ground to begin with," says Richard.

"It also means everybody understands the power of prayer, everybody understands the cross is where we start and finish and everybody understands that we stand there, humbled before God."

"If we are not able to do that as individuals or if we don't know that as individuals, we want to go off on our own tangents and that will always get us in trouble."

Richard says he remembers many times over those early years when the schools' communities came together in prayer. Sometimes it was for favourable funding decisions, other times for protection against threats or dangers, but primarily it was for wisdom.

"It has always worked. It's the foundation and the faith that we work on."

While God's hand is still evident in so many areas of NT Christian Schools, Richard is especially heartened to know the values and standards implemented by the original members are still part of the culture.

"Some of the people who were on those first boards were just so inspiring and gave so much energy to the place down over the years," he says.

"They were willing to change their minds as they grew through the years, were willing to take on challenges in putting new schools together and I see many of the present council and board members, board in particular, are excited to want to keep things going.

"But why should I be surprised? We serve a big God who has plans we don't even know about."

As he waits for God's plans to be revealed, Richard continues to pray.

"I'm grateful I've been involved in [NT Christian Schools] over so many years and seen it grow from one little building in the middle of a paddock to something that's just unbelievable now. We never would have thought we'd have seven schools," he says.

"I'm just hoping and praying that eventually we will be 20 schools in the Territory."

He also prays the organisation will continue to be a place where there is always excitement, excitement built on the foundation that we are children of God and He has so much for us to learn.

"He wants to challenge us but He wants us to go His way and that can only be done through a commitment to prayer, to seeking His wisdom and seeking His direction.

"If we do that, we will be successful whatever we do. Not always in the eyes of the world but certainly in building a foundation and a future that is for eternity."

Herman Nyhuis

When Herman Nyhuis and his wife Lynn arrived in Darwin in 1977, establishing a Christian School was not an activity he ever imagined he would be doing.

But when a church pastor asked Herman to join a parent group looking at establishing a school that would educate students from a Christian perspective, that is exactly where he found himself.

“I was brought up with encouragement to use my talents, experience, insights and gifts. The fact that I had some, though limited experience in a Christian school, I thought maybe that I had something to offer.”

As a teacher, a parent and a strong believer in Jesus Christ, Herman most certainly had “something” to offer.

He joined the parent group and before the year was out, this core group of faithful believers had established Darwin Christian Schools Association (NT Christian Schools’ original name).

The Association was formally incorporated with 34 members and Herman was elected to the first board of directors.

“There have been numerous people who have participated in this school so to make founding members something special is...” Herman pauses for a moment and smiles.

“No, actually I think it was a pretty special time,” he laughs, changing his mind.

The creation of NT Christian Schools certainly holds a special place in many people’s hearts.

Between October 1977 when the Association was

formally incorporated, and February 1979 when the Association opened its first school, God’s provision was visible in so many ways.

Not only was the NT Government cooperative and supportive, but the Association was given land twice (the original block was flood prone and unsuitable for building upon), given strong support from the community and assistance from a significant number of volunteers.

“We were immeasurably blessed,” says Herman.

In fact throughout 1978, volunteers worked almost every weekend to help prepare the land for school buildings and a playground, to help build a classroom and toilet block, or to simply lend a hand when needed.

“I don’t remember a lot about meetings, negotiations and all those sorts of details, but I do remember that the school was very hands on by parents. It was a great thing.”

The implementation of Christian-based education however, was a little more difficult.

While the original focus was probably more to avoid “public education where teachers could relate things from any perspective”, Herman says Christian-based education was a concept teachers grappled with continually over the years.

It was a process of continual learning and a continual working-out of God’s desire for students.

“People have all kinds of ideas about what Christian Education is,” says Herman.

“Some schools simply say, ‘well we have bible study and therefore that makes it Christian’. Other people like me believe it is much more about making it an

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Herman Nyhuis

Herman Nyhuis



"We were hoping to build a school which would help the next generation understand the God of the Universe and find ways of serving Him in a very personal and relational way – offering our hearts to God!"

Herman Nyhuis



integrated part of life; part of your mathematics, part of your English, a way of life.

"But it's often easier to make that statement rather than to put it into effect. How do you teach mathematics from a Christian perspective? Do you count the pages in the bible? Not really.

"... We were learning."

In the early 1980s, Herman left his position as board director to take on the deputy principal role at Marrara Christian School.

"It was pretty exciting but obviously my function became totally different because I could no longer be part of the governing body... I spent the next four years as deputy principal with Jack Mechielsen as principal. Subsequent to which I was appointed principal."

Herman was principal for five years, during which time he was part of many challenging but also many exciting events, including the establishment of Palmerston Christian School.

"At the end of my time I felt that I had given what I could. It was time for somebody else to take the reins."

He admits in hindsight he could have done some things slightly differently, but knows his time had purpose.

"I need to be drawn back and focus on what this was all about; that is to serve God. How do we serve God in this community? By serving each other and by doing our job as well as we can."

When asked what foundation he would like NT Christian Schools to hold into the future, Herman's answer is Jesus.

"The focus needs to be bible based, that needs to be an unshakable basis," he says. "Many Christian organisations are no longer Christian... They may still have Christian in their name but they don't really reflect that."

He also hopes for closer relationships between parents and staff at the schools, relationships that are aligned with the original mission of the Association: to provide education, training and care in faithful response to the Gospel of Christ by partnering with Christian parents to help them fulfil their mandate of educating their children in Christ.

"You can become very busy and lose focus of what this is about. It's about Christian education – pointing students to Jesus and His mission on earth. The question is whether students have been challenged to serve Him with the gifts they have been given."



“We also had huge fetes in the early days, with people bringing all sorts of things to sell. We even had Pro Hart donate paintings [to auction] because someone here was a friend of his.”

Sue Wright

Sue Wright

It was just a normal day, a typical conversation between friends.

The friends, – including Sue Wright and Dr George Hutter, director of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) – were chatting about Christianity and about children at school when Dr Hutter voiced his desire to establish a Christian school in Darwin.

While several Catholic schools were operating at the time, Dr Hutter wanted “a Protestant-type school”, one that would incorporate more bible teaching into its day-to-day activities for the huge contingent of children at SIL.

Sue loved the idea.

“I was very passionate about having a Christian school in Darwin ...I wanted [my children] to have a good start that reinforced our Christian teaching in the home and our Christian values,” Sue explains.

Spurred on by the possibilities, the idea was floated among the churches of Darwin. Before long, the proposal led to meetings, the meetings led to steering committees and eventually – in October 1977 – the formal incorporation of Darwin Christian School Association.

“Everyone was very passionate about the school... We had a band of united parents and it was very much a team effort,” Sue says.

The government, keen to get schools up and running again after Cyclone Tracy, also jumped on board.

It offered the Association a block of land on McMillians Road that was, unfortunately, very swampy. Drainage would need to be installed, a financial consideration

the Association was not expecting.

“The board was very prayerful, no decisions were made without people praying... everything was committed to God,” Sue explains.

So while the board was praying for wisdom, a prayer march was organised around the new block of land.

Strangely enough, the wrong address was advertised and everyone met, marched and prayed around a different block to the one the Association had been granted. “Nobody realised,” Sue laughs.

But God was in control. When it became apparent that the cost of the drainage would be significant, the Association approached the Anglican church about the empty block of land it owned, also on McMillians Road but with far less drainage problems.

The church agreed to surrender the title of the land so it could be transferred to Darwin Christian Schools Association.

It was the same block of land the prayer group had “mistakenly” marched around.

“That sort of thing happened all the time; [God’s] provision for this, that and the other,” says Sue.

With a block of land, the Association and its team of faithful volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare the school for opening.

“We weren’t quite ready for the start of 1979 when we wanted to begin, but God provided,” Sue says.

“The workers camp that was built after the cyclone at Tracy Village had been closed down and we were able to have a building in there to start the school.

Ron and Sue Wright



"We shouldn't have been surprised because Christianity wasn't just for us, Christian education wasn't just a thing that our little group needed,"

Sue Wright

"[Marrara Christian] school started with two teachers, 45 students and a secretary out in that old Tracy Village building. The kids loved it... Mrs Hart had years one to three and Ian Batchelor, the then headmaster, had the other classes, four, five, six and seven.

"It was a very inauspicious start but we got it going."

Finding the finances to keep the school operating was the next challenge, but again in the face of difficulty God's blessings flowed.

"There were a couple of hard times when staff voluntarily took salary cuts in the early days, but on the whole, we were provided with everything that we needed."

Sue recalls with fondness the "cake stall after cake stall" that many of the women volunteers conducted at the old Casuarina shopping centre and the film nights held every month under the shade shelter to raise money for the school.

"The community spirit was really, really something," she says.

"We also had huge fetes in the early days, with people bringing all sorts of things to sell. We even had Pro Hart donate paintings [to auction] because someone here was a friend of his."

In just nine short years, God's provision for Marrara extended to Palmerston and the Association had its second school.

Araluen in Alice Springs joined two year later, and Darwin Christian Schools Association changed its name to Northern Territory Christian Schools Association to accommodate its newest member.

Litchfield (now known as Sattler), Nhulunbuy and Gawa Christian Schools joined shortly thereafter.

Sue says while Association had high hopes in early days, she doesn't believe anyone expected the growth God brought about from one small conversation between friends more than forty years ago.

"We shouldn't have been surprised because Christianity wasn't just for us, Christian education wasn't just a thing that our little group needed," she says.

"But I must admit an element of surprise with how vast it grew."

In 1981 Sue joined Marrara as a teacher. She spent more than 20 years in the secondary school, instructing and training generations of students coming through the doors of the school.

"I love it when I am up the street and I meet ex-students and they introduce me to their little families and tell me what they are doing, or when I visit churches and see an ex-student involved in the worship leading or team work or pastoring. I think, 'yes, thank you God'.

"That is a real blessing."

Sue hopes, trusts and prays God will continue to grow NT Christian Schools well into the future, building on the vision and dreams of its founding members.

"It took a while to bring the vision together," she says, recalling those early days.

"But [our] number one aim was to have a school where God was honoured, where God was the head of the school. Number two was to provide a sound education for children.

"... I know there will be challenges because there is competition around, but I just pray that [NT Christian Schools] continues to prosper and grow not necessarily in size but grow the students in that sort of quality and ethos that we wanted for them."

“We had bills coming up and no money in the bank and the money just came in... Without prayer, we wouldn’t have made it as far as we did. Every step of the way there was prayer.”

Clare Stanley

Clare Stanley

Clare Stanley is not your typical board director. Humble, unassuming and soft-spoken, it’s easy to underestimate her.

But with a deep reliance, a trust and a strong personal relationship with God, it’s easy to see why she was elected to the board of Darwin Christian Schools Association (now known as NT Christian Schools) forty years ago.

She was the board’s first woman director.

“It was interesting. I don’t know how much I contributed as far as knowledge because [governing a school] was not something I really knew much about. But I brought a women’s point of view and a parent’s point of view.”

Clare first heard about the establishment of a Christian school in Darwin through friends.

While excited at the prospect, the school only offered primary classes when it opened its doors in 1979 and several of her children were too old to attend.

Instead Clare and her husband waited until the following year, when secondary education was introduced, to enrol their children.

“I wasn’t involved right from the beginning, but I was really excited about the idea of Christian School,” she says.

“I wanted my kids to have Christian input in school as well as in home. They had been in public schools and while these schools were good, different life messages were being taught.”

That same year Clare attended the Association’s annual general meeting and was unexpectedly nominated

and then elected as a board member.

“I came to the annual general meeting as a parent and Ron [Wright] persuaded me to get onto the board,” she smiles. “... I was at that stage where I would always, if I thought something was a God thing, do it whether I thought I was capable or not.”

But capable she was and throughout her time as director, Clare saw God working in so many exciting ways to provide for the school, particularly financially.

“Getting Marrara off the ground and working was a major thing,” she says.

“In fact I know there were people who didn’t think we would get off the ground and who definitely thought it would always be limping along. But God did wonderful things.”

The board, she says, prayed a lot about money.

“We had bills coming up and no money in the bank and the money just came in... Without prayer, we wouldn’t have made it as far as we did. Every step of the way there was prayer.”

For Clare, even safe travel to board meetings were covered in prayer.

“I feel embarrassed, but my first challenge was just getting to board meetings,” she says smiling.

“Karama hadn’t been built at that stage. There was just McMillians road, no Amy Johnson avenue, no street lights, just a little mud path to the school off McMillians road.

“I used to pray every time, ‘Lord, please show me where to go. If possible, please let somebody go in front of me so I know exactly where to turn’.

Marrara site the first of the NT Christian Schools.



Marrara Christian College site 2017

“It was pitch black, there were cars going backwards and forwards and no notices or signs for the turnoff. But I did, I got there every time.”

Clare resigned from the board when she fell pregnant with her fourth child but re-joined the school as a staff member, a laboratory technician, five years later. She remained part of the school for 27 years.

She remembers much growth and change at the Association over those years including the name change from Darwin Christian Schools to Northern Territory Christian Schools, the gradual expansion from one to seven schools and the faithfulness of God during those busy seasons.

“The specialist buildings [at Marrara] were a big outlay, but then there was Palmerston and then there was Alice Springs... and then I think it was Sattler,” she says.

“I know there have been people in NT Christian Schools who have been visionaries, who have seen [God’s plans] and have gone ahead and paved the way. But from an ordinary person looking in, it has just been an amazing journey.”

Clare hopes she never stops being amazed at the way God is working at NT Christian Schools and prays she will see more and more children finish their schooling strong in the knowledge that they are known and loved by Jesus.

“My main hope is that the children who come out of the schools have a grounding. Even the ones who

haven’t yet made up their minds, I hope they will know that God loves them and that they need Him in their lives.”

But to ensure this, Clare says it is vital that NT Christian Schools remains distinctly Christian and dedicated to God.

“I don’t think we need to bash kids over the head with the bible all the time but I think we need to live with the bible in our lives, guiding us,” she says.

“It is a danger now that we have a lot of children, now that we have a lot of buildings, now that we have funding, to forget that God is the one who we need to be looking to and asking Him what He wants for the schools.”

She says throughout the world there are many organisations that began as Christian but have now moved away from their founding beliefs. She prays that NT Christian Schools will never forget its roots or its story.

The founding members, she continues, may have stepped out “with fear and trembling” but they were obedient and God led every step of the way.

“The world is a bit of minefield at the moment and I think it is really important to hold on. Holding onto God is the only thing that makes a difference in our lives.”

“The people who enrolled their children at that stage showed tremendous commitment and courage because here we were, a couple of teachers employed, but no field, no buildings, no equipment.”

Ian Bachelor

Ian Bachelor

When Ian Bachelor was appointed Marrara’s first principal in 1978, he admits he was a little daunted by the task ahead.

Not only was Marrara a new school, but he was also part of introducing a whole new style of education to the Territory.

“I’m absolutely certain there were times when I thought, ‘what are we getting ourselves into,” he laughs.

“It took an enormous amount of organisation and planning and trust and belief just to get it off the ground initially... but I had a tremendously supportive board behind me and parents who were ready to get involved and volunteer.”

Ian was working at Casuarina High School in the mid 1970s when he and a small group of Christian friends came together, concerned by the direction the public education system was heading.

They knew there were Christian schools in other parts of Australia and they were keen to develop something similar in the Territory.

“We formed an interim steering committee and met informally for a while to start putting down some concrete ideas about how a school might develop, how it might be set up and what was involved,” he says.

“We also made contact with other Christian Schools, particularly in Tasmania.”

In fact, the more Ian spoke to people working in Christ-centred schools and the more he researched Christian-education models, the more excited he became.

“I thought, ‘this is a tremendous concept for establishing Christian beliefs and principles in young children’.”

In these Christ-centred schools he saw a freedom not found in the public-school system; a freedom to express Christian beliefs and a freedom to present a Christian viewpoint throughout the whole curriculum, not just once a week during a religious education lesson.

Spurred on by his discoveries, Ian decided to stand down from the interim committee and submit his application for the principal’s position at the new school.

He had prayerfully considered the position and had “a strong conviction” that God was leading him to apply.

“I didn’t know a great deal about how [the school] was going to develop and what was involved, I was just excited about the possibility of a God-centred, Christ-centred educational system that wasn’t available and wasn’t permitted in the public system.”

The Darwin Christian Schools Association board accepted his application for the position, deliberated and then appointed Ian the first principal of Marrara Christian School.

Once word spread among the churches that a new school was being established, enrolments started filing in.

Another teacher, Lyn Hart, was employed to work with Ian and the board worked quickly to secure classrooms, equipment and other much-needed resources.

“The people who enrolled their children at that stage

“It is just amazing how exponentially it has grown and how God has just blessed so wonderfully the whole movement throughout... the rest of the Northern Territory,”

Ian Bachleor

Ian Bachelor



showed tremendous commitment and courage because here we were, a couple of teachers employed, but no field, no buildings, no equipment.”

In fact, he says without the commitment of so many Christian parents, the school “wouldn’t have gone anywhere”.

“They were taking a step of faith themselves, really stepping out because nothing like [Marrara] existed in the Territory, nothing anywhere else in the Territory, it was largely an unknown concept.

“So I think it is wonderful testimony to their faith and recognition, their beliefs, their energy and desire to see their children raised, brought up in and given a Christian education.”

The school had about 45-50 enrolments by the time it opened in 1979.

Interestingly, Ian says, the original name of the school was ‘Marrara School’, without the Christian accolade.

“There were a few of us who decided this was significant, that it wasn’t clear enough and wasn’t advertising our style of education strongly enough, so we ended up changing the name to Marrara Christian School.”

Ian remained at Marrara for three years, leaving at the end of 1981 to complete further study interstate.

Throughout that time, the school experienced huge growth, significantly increasing both its student and staff numbers.

But with limited funds, the school still struggled to provide in the way of equipment. “We never stole, but we certainly begged and borrowed everywhere we could to get materials for the kids.”

However, parents and children never felt deprived.

“I can remember talking with kids and their parents after the first two or three years and asking... if they felt they had missed out because we were in the beginning stages without much in the way of equipment or resources?

“No one felt they had missed out. They all said it was such an exciting time to be involved, to be a part of what God was doing.”

Ian has visited Darwin many times over the years and has continued to keep an eye on the changes and developments from afar.

“It is just amazing how exponentially it has grown and how God has just blessed so wonderfully the whole movement throughout... the rest of the Northern Territory,” he says.

“People have been faithful, trusted God, believed in what they are doing and had an uncompromising attitude to what was needed in terms of Christian education, and God has honoured this.”

He says there are examples of many church schools throughout Australia that began with strong ideals and strong belief systems, but compromised and allowed those beliefs and ideals to be shaped by culture over the years.

Ian prays that as Northern Territory Christian Schools moves into the future, it will remain faithful, standing with “one mind, one direction, one commitment, one purpose and one trust in God”.

“Without these core values and beliefs, the whole system will just break down. There will be no reason to have a Christ-centred school.”

Murray Redman

When Murray Redman and his wife Toni arrived in Darwin in 1982, Christian education was an unfamiliar concept.

Having lived in Papua New Guinea most of his life, Murray had never been exposed to Christian education and was wary that its practices may not align with its intentions.

But needing a school for their children and as Marrara was the only Christian school in Darwin at that time, Murray and Toni signed up.

They completed enrolment interviews, met the school staff, saw classes in action and joined the Darwin Christian Schools Association.

They knew they had made the right decision.

“It became obvious that [Christ-centredness] was something that was actually practiced, was a commitment or conviction that the school had...This was not just words, but Christ was centre to everything that was done,” he says.

Murray joined the Darwin Christian Schools Association's board shortly thereafter, remaining a director for five years before taking a short break. He then served on-and-off over the next twenty years, including time as president and vice president.

He was part of many changes over this period including the expansion from one school to six, a name change (from Darwin to Northern Territory Christian Schools Association) and the introduction of an Indigenous boarding program.

More importantly however, he was part of keeping the

Association's founding beliefs and values – namely its Christ-centeredness – constant.

“I have said many times over the years, as I have become more and more involved and less and less involved, that the critical element for maintaining our identity as a Christian school... is to be constantly and eternally vigilant about the recruitment of staff,” he says.

“We need to be absolutely sure that the people we put in our classrooms and in the support roles for our classrooms, are people who are themselves Christ-centred. If they are not, then the school will not.

“For us to be vigilant about that, we need to be vigilant about the membership of the Association. The people who become members and therefore the decision makers, the people who put boards and councils in place, need to be Christ-centred people.

“That is incredibly important.”

Without this common thread – the belief that Christ is at the centre of all we do – Murray says the pressure to conform to the world will become too great.

“We had waiting lists for students [in the early 1980s] because Marrara was the only non-government school in Darwin. Everybody, apart from the Roman Catholics, who wanted to have non-government education would come to Marrara and that created pressures.

“We had the pressure to be an elite school, the pressure to be a private school, the pressure to put undue emphasis on academic excellence over anything else. Those sorts of pressures were real and those were the sorts of things we had to resist.”

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Murray Redman

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Murray Redman



Murray says great blessings have resulted from standing firm; some of which he has seen, some of which he can still see through the schools and some of which he believes will only be seen once he is in heaven.

"I am absolutely sure that when I do [get to heaven], I will see incredible harvests out of our schools.

"Of course, you know as well as I do that being part of a Christian school doesn't do anything for you in itself.

"...You can't say this child or this person is following the Lord because they went to a Christian school because that neglects the acknowledgement of the Christian family and the church in that person's life."

But, he says, there are many examples of children from non-Christian families who have attended one of our schools and made a decision to follow Christ.

"And that is a marvellous thing. Even if it is only a handful of kids, it is well worth it."

The other incredibly important constant in NT Christian School's history, he says, has been a reliance on prayer.

Murray remembers many occasions when, after a time of prayer, the board made decisions that didn't rest well with members. The decision to open Palmerston Christian School was one of those occasions.

"The decision about Palmerston came towards the end of my first term as president and that was difficult. There was a feeling within Marrara that starting another school was going to be competitive with Marrara, financially and in other ways," he says.

"Some people were really digging their heels in and it was a difficult issue to deal with. But we had the

conviction that this was what God wanted us to do and so we went ahead, and it was wonderful that we did."

Similar worries and concerns were again raised when Araluen came on board, when Litchfield was established, in fact every time the Association brought in a new school.

"And I think they were legitimate arguments," says Murray.

"But again, I think it comes back to committing our way to the Lord and seeking His provision for it. If it is God's work, He will provide... It doesn't stop the struggles and doesn't stop us having to work hard at that but His provision will always be there."

Murray believes the great challenge for NT Christian School's in the future will be the ability to hold onto its Christ-centeredness in an increasingly hostile environment.

"I can see in the future that our schools are going to have to make very difficult choices."

And one of those, he says, may be choosing between compromising and bowing to mounting pressure to conform to the world, or standing firm and continuing to operate in a way that ensures our practices align with our intentions.

"Being obedient in following His direction is my hope for the future.

"That absolute, non-negotiable, keeping our education and our schools and the Northern Territory Christian Schools as absolutely and totally and in reality, Christ-centred, where Christ is the head of everything we do and never losing that.

"Never."

Jack Mechielsen

The role of principal in a Christian school is never a job, Jack Mechielsen states firmly.

“It’s a calling and so you need to be confident that God wants you there, doing what you are doing.”

So when Ron Wright jumped on a plane to visit Jack at Mount Evelyn Christian School in Victoria with a proposition – to become the next principal at Marrara Christian School – Jack had to be sure that Darwin was where God wanted him.

“Marrara was certainly a Christian school, but very different from Mount Evelyn,” he says.

“Victoria was a place where people could innovate in education and be adventurous, so one of the things I had to grapple with was that Marrara was in Darwin and it was not in a climate where adventure was part of the deal.

“For me that was a big change to have to deal with, not an insurmountable one but a substantial one... After being here for a fairly short time, I realised that God can skin the educational cat anyway He likes.”

At Mount Evelyn one way, and Marrara another, he says.

“We turned up here on June 30th 1982, which also happened to be my birthday, so it was a great day,” he smiles.

Jack’s five years as principal at Marrara was a time of growth.

As the first independent Christian school, it filled a gap in the Territory’s education system.

Enrolments no longer consisted of Christian parents wanting a Christian education for their children, but also included parents who just wanted “a good school” for their children.

“When I first arrived, the bulk of kids came from Christian families with a church background and that was diluted – and I am using that word not in a pejorative sense – in quite a strong way over that five-year period.

“It was a good challenge because the gospel is as important to those kids as it is for kids who are brought up in a Christian context.”

As more and more non-Christian families joined the school, it became more and more important for the Association to retain its grounding in God and His word, and retain members and staff who would keep it grounded in God and His word.

Jack recalls travelling the country with Murray Redman, the chairman of the board, on numerous occasions to interview potential staff members.

“We would visit every capital city, talk with lots of people and conduct initial interviews with the idea of ensuring [candidates] had a strong and clearly articulated Christian faith, but also to work out how they wanted to see that faith expressed in their work,” he says.

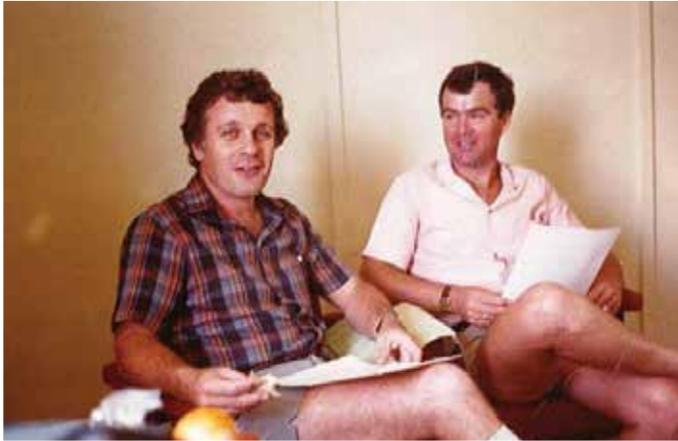
“...This was critical. The minute the school or the Association started appointing staff who didn’t share the common beliefs, primarily in Christ and in his Word, we could kiss the enterprise goodbye.”

Jack also spent a great deal of time while principal, training and building the staff in their understanding of what it meant to teach from a biblical perspective.

“We would visit every capital city, talk with lots of people and conduct initial interviews with the idea of ensuring [candidates] had a strong and clearly articulated Christian faith, but also to work out how they wanted to see that faith expressed in their work”

Jack Mechielsen

far left: Jack Mechielsen and Mike Millard



"In their efforts to provide Christian education for their children, Christian parents and their supportive friends managed to develop an educational community which was attractive to many families Christian or otherwise. God was clearly doing remarkable things among people who claimed that God was to be "central in our school...honoured in daily practice as Lord of all..."

Jack Mechielsen



"The staff were pretty enthusiastic about the training and from my perspective, it was a critical thing to be doing because [teaching from a biblical perspective] doesn't come naturally.

"What comes naturally is icing on the cake, just doing it the way everyone else does it."

Jack wanted to challenge staff, to force them go deeper than just conducting devotions, bible readings and prayers in class.

"That is all necessary and good... but if that is all there is, then all we have is a secular school that just has a name and holier-than-thou things to set it apart. It doesn't actually push its way in to the consciousness of kids and families."

Jack left Marrara in 1987 to become the CEO of Christian Parent Controlled Schools nationally, but returned to NT Christian Schools 13 years later to take on the role of CEO.

By this time, the period of growth that was present at Marrara in 1981 was gone. Other independent schools had been introduced to the Territory and student numbers were beginning to drop.

"Growth had stopped and was in fact beginning to wind back and that is always a tricky time. I think it was God's way of motivating us to think about Indigenous education, what work we could do with Indigenous kids and parents."

Following God's prompts, the Association introduced family group homes and this, says Jack, helped considerably in turning Marrara's situation around.

"Forty percent of the Territory population was Indige-

nous. If we didn't reach any of those people, we were missing the boat."

Tempting as it was to label situations like this "difficulties", Jack says they were anything but. "They were bit tricky and not pleasant, but you wouldn't categorise them as difficulties because that implies there was some mountain you had to climb."

Instead during these challenging periods, God forced the Association into a corner it "should have been in all the time" to help it see a way out, to show it how to fix the problem.

"You can't even think of that as a difficulty!"

"I am not trying to be difficult here," he laughs.

"But these are things that you plough through, you pray through, you work through, knowing that God is there all the time.

"You can worry, but it actually doesn't help a lot to worry because God's hand is a million times bigger than ours and he has it all in hand."

Jack has no doubt the future of NT Christian Schools is also in God's hand.

"The fact that [Christian education] continues is a testimony to the Lord rather than to people," he says.

"...My hope for the future would be that people would be faithful to the Lord and seek to serve him well in education, whatever that might mean and however that might work its way out. That Christian is not just a label on the school but is the thing that actually sits underneath everything that happens in and around the place."

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA
ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION ORDINANCE 1963

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION OF AN ASSOCIATION

4492 ✓

I, Berry Graham Keitel, the Deputy Registrar of Companies
for the Northern Territory of Australia, in pursuance of section eight of the Associations
Incorporation Ordinance 1963 hereby certify that

DARWIN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

has this day been incorporated under the Ordinance.

Dated this Sixteenth day of June 1977.



A special thankyou

As we look back over the past 40 years, we give thanks for the Lord and what He has done in Christian education in the Northern Territory, and the people who established and grew the organisation in faithful response to the vision God gave them.

We acknowledge God's sovereignty and supremacy over all things within NT Christian Schools.

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15-17

¹² We recognise that at a time when culture is often at odds with a Christian worldview, it is all the more important that we intentionally protect, preserve and perpetuate the vision for generations to come.

Therefore, we urge the current generation of members, staff and Christian parents to hold firm to the vision to provide education, training and care shaped by the gospel of Christ into the future.

¹³ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. ¹⁴ Do everything in love.

1 Corinthians 16:12-14