

VMTC New Zealand • History

The Early Vision

Victorious Ministry Through Christ (VMTC) was founded through Mrs Anne S White of Florida, one of the world's first post-war charismatics, who alone in a shipboard cabin received the baptism of the Holy Spirit before there had been any contemporary teaching on it. The spiritual impact of this experience upon her was profound, and in due time led to her becoming a leading international evangelist through the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

Years before VMTC existed, Mrs White began to realise as a result of her Christian experience that something seemed to be missing when ministering to hurting and troubled people. She found that too often people who received prayer about various matters would continue to come back to their clergy or trusted friends over and over again to deal with the same problems. Either true victory seldom came, or they easily lost the victory God had given them. A missing key was shown to Mrs White in a dramatic encounter with God in 1948, when she was a young mother with little time for the things of God. That encounter, which was to lay the foundation for what would eventually become VMTC prayer ministry, is recalled by Mrs White in her book *Healing Adventure* (1969):

"For three long years our five-year-old son had suffered from dreadful asthmatic attacks, and even a change in climate had brought no relief. During the most severe times of congestion, he had to be given shots of adrenalin to relieve his laboured breathing. My heart sank as I heard our son's paediatrician say, 'There's not much hope that he will outgrow this...We've tried all the wonder drugs. There's really nothing more we can do medically.'...I could not bear such a verdict...Somehow I felt guilty.

"That night I read copies of *Sharing Magazine* that I had previously been too busy to read. As I put out the light, it seemed that my childhood faith (which I had lost at college) was restored, for I had just read of many recent healings to God's glory. Strangely enough, most of them involved resentments and the need for forgiveness of this sin of the heart. At two in the morning I awakened and went to see what I could do to relieve our son's laboured breathing, but it was too early to give any medicine. Inwardly, as I groaned, 'There's nothing I can do,' I sensed a still small voice within me saying, 'Yes, there is. You can kneel down and pray.' In amazement I heard (from) within me, 'It is not My Will for an innocent child to suffer. It is your bitter resentment, and you must forgive this person,' [a reference to her mother-in-law whom she resented living with]. By God's grace I was able to say, 'I forgive her, Lord'—and to my great surprise I really meant it! The still small voice continued, 'If you really have faith you will thank me before you see the results.' And in that moment of amazing grace, I heard myself saying, 'Thank you, Lord.' Our son took one deep, quiet breath—and he has never had another asthmatic attack!"

Thus began Anne S White's healing adventure with God—seeking to know more of His will, to follow Him, to practice more of the principles of prayer, which our Lord taught in His earthly ministry. This experience revolutionised Mrs White's attitude to God, her family and those about her. In what became a lifelong immersion in divine healing until her death in January 2000, Mrs White sought to be used to bring the redeeming love of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit into the lives of others, of those bruised by the sin of the world, of those filled with hate (as she once was), to those victims of their own self-pity—what she described as 'the bitter and the fearful.' Mrs White has left a precious legacy of her spiritual walk in a series of eight books published between 1969 and 1998, the last of which, *Winning Victory*, is the closest to an autobiography. Her books include teachings, testimonies, devotions, and prophecy, and all remain in print.

International Foundations

Mrs White first realised the need for prayer ministry among the clergy, who too often had no one they felt they could turn to for confidential prayer. The need to train prayer ministers became paramount, and initial training efforts concentrated on ministers and ministers' wives. Not many years later, VMTC training was extended to the laity, who today play a major part. Historically, VMTC national presidents and school directors have been ministers, but this too is changing as laypeople enter the ranks of both. Each ministering team has always included one man and one woman, as the Lord revealed the unique practical and spiritual dynamic in this combination.

And so it was that late in 1970, the first pilot VMTC training school was held in Florida. The following year VMTC Florida was founded as a trans-denominational charity, with Mrs. White as president under the

authority of a board of directors drawn from various local churches. Since that time, VMTC prayer ministry has spread internationally and is today active in Sweden, Finland, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA, under corresponding national boards. In the Norwegian language, the ministry is known as *Helhet gjennom Kristus* (Wholeness Through Christ). VMTC Pakistan was also active for many years and is at present in recess. VMTC Great Britain was founded in 1974 and, while it no longer exists as such, its successors *Wholeness Through Christ UK* and *Christian Prayer Ministries UK* (CPM) are extremely active. All three ministries follow the same scriptural principles, and steps are now underway to draw VMTC International and CPM organisationally closer.

VMTC International seeks to transplant to other countries the ministry it has been given. In every case, two member countries will combine to bring training to the new country, and will support that country until it is strong enough to stand alone. The early transplants were staffed by VMTC USA, until the English were trained and able to partner the Americans. The next completed transplants were in Sweden (1977) and Australia (1978). Following upon the last completed transplant—to New Zealand in the early 1990s—steps are now being taken by member nations towards transplanting the ministry to Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and India. Taking the ministry into countries in which English is not widely spoken has required extra effort and anointing. This was first evident in Sweden where Mrs White wrote in 1978 that “it was exciting to prayer minister with a Finn to a Swede, with Swedish, Finnish, and English being spoken in the same session.” The Swedes had by then translated all the VMTC teaching materials and three of Anne S White’s books into Swedish. A similar effort will be needed in India.

Since 1980 an international board has overseen VMTC. The board has representatives from each member country, and meets biennially. The first international president was the Rev Al Brock (USA), soon to be followed by Norwegian Arne Rudvin, Bishop of Karachi, and from 2000 Rev Robert Horn (USA). Until her death, Mrs Anne S White took the role of International Coordinator, spending much time travelling the world to oversee transplants. The international board agrees international standards, which each nation observes through “creative conformity.” Improvements in prayer ministry practice are evaluated by individual nations before being considered for general adoption, and every care is taken to maintain scriptural authority.

Establishment of VMTC in New Zealand

For four years during the late 1980s, the leaders of VMTC Australia laboured in prayer that the Lord might graciously allow VMTC ministry into New Zealand. New Zealanders were unaware of this until in 1989 a friendship developed between retired Auckland teacher Barry Hogan, his wife Valerie, and Rev Bruce Sligo, a member of the VMTC Australia Board. Bruce was living on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, where the Hogans were visiting with a view to retirement. Their conversations sowed the seeds that led to the ministry being transplanted to New Zealand during the early 1990s.

In Aug 1990, as a first step, Mrs Anne S White and Rev Bruce Sligo carried out a reconnaissance of New Zealand when they held very successful VMTC missions at St Paul’s, Auckland, and St Andrew’s, Howick, and a retreat at the Franciscan Friary, Hillsborough. During this time the ministry was explained and foundational teaching given. St Paul’s was accepted as a suitable initial ‘covering’ and by the time of the missions a VMTC NZ committee had been formed, and a bank account opened. Promotional newsletters began to appear, and word of the ministry spread. Rev Bill Heald, vicar of St Paul’s, became chairman, with Rev Frank Rigg of Red Beach Methodist as Area Coordinator. Late in 1990, Rev Bill Heald, Gae Heald, and several St Paul’s elders attended a VMTC training school in Sydney, to gain further insight into the ministry. Likewise in February 1991 Rev Frank and Gwen Rigg, and Michael Jones of St Paul’s, attended a school in Hobart.

Following a report on the reconnaissance, the international board sanctioned a transplant of VMTC to New Zealand, with responsibility to be shared by VMTC USA and VMTC Australia, under the direction of Mrs White as International Coordinator. Thus it was that in 1991, a full programme of VMTC training schools and retreats was mounted, and the transplant to NZ soil formally began. In May 1991, a combined US/Australian team of seven spent 17 days without a break in what, but for the Holy Spirit, would have been regarded as a gruelling schedule of back-to-back events. The team of Anne S White (Florida), Denis Van Loan (California), Laura Wygant (New Mexico), Rev Russell and Ann Thompson (Sydney), Alex Kornaczewski (Hobart), and Glenyce Smith (Queensland) spent eleven days in Auckland staffing two four-day training schools and a three-day retreat (all at the friary), and a two-day mission at St George’s, Epsom; and six days in Wellington conducting a retreat at Waikanae and a mission at St Christopher’s, Tawa, under Vicar Rev Chris Tims. This was to set a standard of commitment as successive teams, coming twice a year for several years, gave sacrificially of their time, and met their own international travel expenses. This was an immense gift to New Zealand at every level. In November 1991, Wellington received its first school, and Auckland another school and retreat, under a fresh US/Australian team of Rev Al and Betty Salt (New Jersey), Rev John and Monica Nyhan (New York), Lesley Hodge (Queensland), Ann

Thompson (Sydney), and Rev Ian McAlister (Queensland). The first New Zealander released as a prayer minister was Rev Bill Heald, who assisted at the first school.

New Zealand benefited from the teaching and coaching of many senior overseas personnel, who collectively made 46 visits during the seven years 1991-97 spanned by the transplant. The leaders, Mrs Anne S White and Rev Bruce Sligo, made five visits each. Ian McAlister and Christine Demmer (Melbourne) made three visits each, and Ann Thompson, eight. The objective of the two partner nations was to maintain their input until such time as NZ had sufficient trained ministers to run its own training programme. Thus from late 1993, the overseas team was progressively scaled back as local personnel became able to present the required teachings and were released as prayer ministers. During 1993 Rev Bill Heald accepted an appointment in a London parish, and Rev Frank Rigg became NZ chairman. Eleanor Benton-Mandeno and her husband Ian Mandeno provided a national secretariat and meeting space in their Takapuna home, and gave so much to the early establishment of the ministry. In 1995, VMTC NZ became a direct importer of Anne S White's books, so as to be able to secure their availability in NZ. Because they contain so much foundational teaching, the books have always been made available for sale at schools and by postal inquiry.

By the time of the 1994 schools, Frank Rigg was shouldering much of the teaching in Auckland, and Rev Brian Brandon (Papatoetoe) and Rev Steve Peace (Tawa) had become directors-in-training. Over the final two years of the transplant, Bruce Sligo, who had become President VMTC Australia and Regional Superintendent for New Zealand, took a monitoring role. In August 1995, at Waikanae, he monitored a wholly NZ team for the first time, comprising Rev Frank Rigg and Pastor Graham Renouf (Dannevirke) who together handled the teaching, Michael Jones, Eleanor Benton-Mandeno, Debbie Robinson (Wellington), and Nell Smith (then of Wellington). In 1996, NZ teams staffed a full programme of four schools, two each in Auckland and Wellington, with an Australian present for oversight. The NZ organization was gaining stature, and in that same year held its first formal AGM.

The April 1997 schools were successfully conducted without overseas assistance, and it was judged that the time was appropriate for the NZ operation to be internationally assessed with a view to it being granted the status of a provisional national board. The standard required by the international board for the admission of a new nation into the body was (as Bruce Sligo advised) "that there should be at least six local clergy released as lead prayer ministers and able to handle the most difficult cases, to teach in an anointed way, and to do the scheduling effectively. There should be at least three women who have been released as lead 'training' prayer ministers." In the belief that this standard had been reached, NZ asked to be assessed at its September 1997 school. The NZ evaluation was conducted by Rev Bruce Sligo and Rev David Houghland (Canada), both members of the VMTC international executive.

The evaluation report, delivered in December 1997, recommended that at its next meeting the VMTC International Board accept VMTC NZ as a full national board member, and that in the meantime a New Zealand provisional board be appointed, comprising Rev Frank Rigg (President), Rev Brian Brandon, Rev Lachlan McKay (Nelson), Pastor Alan O'Neill (Whakatane), Pastor Graham Renouf, Pastor Geoff Willmott (Hastings), John McCash (Tawa), Mrs Eleanor Benton-Mandeno (Secretary), and Michael Jones (Treasurer). Full board status was conferred in September 1998 when at the international board meeting (IBM) in Canada, Rev Frank Rigg signed for NZ the international agreement that unites the member countries in matters of prayer ministry principles and practice. At the 1999 AGM of the NZ board, Pastor Geoff Willmott retired and Rev Paul Loveday, formerly of VMTC Pakistan, and Brian Mitcherson of Hastings, were invited to join the board. In 2006, Pastor Diane Hamilton (Whangarei) and David Gerrard (Palmerston North) joined the board. Rev Frank Rigg remained National President until 2006, retiring after 13 years of devoted service in the position, and was succeeded by Pastor Graham Renouf.

The Ministry and Programmes

The heart of VMTC is training, and over the 16 years 1991-2006, there have been approximately 1650 attendances at 66 training schools of prayer ministry in New Zealand, with an average of 25 participants. Many came for personal healing and spiritual growth, and some came to be progressively trained for this ministry. Some who trained to the point of release as support or lead VMTC prayer ministers have not remained permanently in the ministry, but use the training and experience to strengthen them in other ministries. Those who choose to remain active VMTC prayer ministers attend a training school at least every two years to maintain currency. Most attend training far more often, and beyond that participate in providing prayer ministry to those in need, on a month by month basis. As at 2006, approximately 75 VMTC prayer ministers were currently validated across the country, in the lead or support position. The majority were resident in the North Island.

The format of training schools is kept under review, bearing in mind that schools have been traditionally residential (and thus costly) and have required significant amounts of time off work (again costly). In June

1999, Rev Paul Loveday in consultation with Pastor Graham Renouf experimented with a non-residential model at Knox-St Columba Presbyterian Church, Lower Hutt. The non-residential option has not yet again been tried in New Zealand, though it is now well developed in Florida. Instead, in 2006, VMTC NZ began holding shortened schools, backed by other training programmes. This model reduces the time that needs to be taken off work to one day, and is thus more appealing to those in the workforce.

An important secondary role of VMTC has always been to offer foundational teaching on spiritual wholeness, which in the early 1990s took the form of three-day residential retreats on a regional basis or two-day, non-residential missions at individual churches, under the banner of *Healing of the Whole Person* or the like. Neither programme included personal prayer ministry, but many of those attending found release and healing through sitting under the teaching and allowing the Holy Spirit to minister. Some graduated to training schools later. By the end of the 1990s, retreats and missions had become less frequent, and in their place had emerged their modern equivalent, a neighbourhood-based, non-residential, modular approach to teaching and training first developed by Rev Paul Loveday at Knox-St Columba in 2001. The programme was subsequently reviewed and refocused by VMTC Wellington, under the banner *Freed to Live*. In due time the modular approach was also used in Auckland and Nelson, and has since become a key component of VMTC NZ programming. A variant on the programme, known as *Freed to Serve*, is being evaluated in Nelson, where it is pitched at those already involved in praying for others in a parish context. The modular programmes can be weekend-based, or spread across an evening a week over several weeks, and can be conducted in any venue from a church to a private home. Each region now schedules one or more such event annually.

New Zealand has been a very active member of VMTC International, particularly in conceiving and advancing the modular approach to teaching and training, and taking it to the international board as a model for commendation and eventual adoption. At its 2002 meeting, the international board encouraged VMTC to further assess the module formats *Freed to Live* and *Freed to Serve*. At the 2004 IBM, the *Freed to Live* format and teaching outline as tendered by VMTC NZ was adopted as "an official outreach" of VMTC International and was commended to all national boards, many of which soon adopted it as an integral part of their annual programmes.

From 1998, VMTC NZ has been represented at IBMs by its successive national presidents Frank Rigg and Graham Renouf, plus vice-president Michael Jones in 2006. Rev Brian Brandon has attended as Secretary to the international board and as a member of its executive, positions he has held since 2002. Since 2003, Michael Jones has assisted International President Robert Horn in liaising with sister prayer ministries in the UK. VMTC NZ has also taken initiatives towards taking the ministry into fresh countries, with reconnaissance visits to Fiji in 2002 and India in 2006.

Regionalisation of VMTC NZ

Owing to the considerable distance between urban centres, New Zealand has lent itself to a regional management structure within a strategic national framework. Initially, regional programmes in Auckland and Wellington were managed through the national committee. In 1996, a first step was taken towards devolution when the national committee sanctioned the establishing of a committee in the lower part of the North Island to look after the planning, promotion, and administration of programmes there. In 1999, VMTC crossed into the South Island when Rev Lachlan McKay led two schools at Nelson. In 2002, Auckland and Wellington each became managed by regional committees, which were accountable to the national board "with responsibility for their own administration, finances, and development." Bank accounts were opened in the names of VMTC Auckland and VMTC Wellington. Capitation levies became payable by the regions to finance the national body. In 2003, regional boards were formally set up in Auckland and Wellington, under the respective chairmanships of Rev Frank Rigg and Pastor Graham Renouf, to manage the affairs of the ministry in those regions. At the time, the national board noted that any regional changes from national or international policy or practice would still require approval of the national board, following the principle of unity in decision-making. In 2003, consequent upon Rev Paul Loveday's move to Nelson, a South Island regional committee was formed under his chairmanship, "to run its own affairs and finances under the covering of the national board." Schools were held in Nelson in 2003 and 2005, and—as momentum picked up—twice in 2006. In 2005, national financial covering was lifted from the Nelson operation and VMTC South Island opened its own bank account. All three regional organisations now operate as self-supporting taxation entities.

On 1 December 2004, VMTC NZ became incorporated as a charitable trust, with its own deed of constitution. It enjoys charitable status and donee status under the Income Tax Act. Each regional branch abides by the national constitution and is accorded the same taxation status as the national body.