



# Our First Hundred Years

The story and vision of the  
**Rondebosch United Church**  
1900 – 2001

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# RONDEBOSCH UNITED CHURCH



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Rondebosch United Church, Cape Town

May 2001

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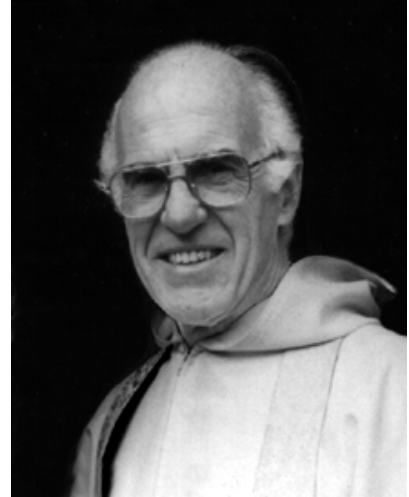
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# Preface

DOUGLAS BAX

*A centenary is a time for people to reflect on the past from which they have come; it is also a time to reflect on the future towards which they are heading. It is a time on the one hand to remember and give thanks and on the other hand to catch or shape a vision for the future.*

As we look back on the last century, we have a great deal for which to thank God. The congregation was founded in the middle of the South African War and survived two world wars. It also survived the effort to be an evangelical congregation that witnessed to Christ as Lord over both the private and the public arenas of life during the struggle over apartheid. Though our stand in that struggle estranged some people, I am deeply aware of the loyalty and support the congregation as a whole showed through those 'struggle' years. As we look back on the past, we give thanks 'for all the saints who from their labours rest', some strong and gifted people, some great characters, some quiet but no less devoted people. We give thanks also for all saints who continue and will continue to glorify God in their worship, work, giving (sometimes exceedingly generous giving!) and witness.



Douglas Bax

In more ways than one our centenary year marks a turning point. 2000/2001 marks the turn of the millennium. Our country is very much still in a stage of transition. It is trying to overcome the effects of the racial policies of the past and to learn how to be a democracy. But the problems it faces are huge: massive unemployment, appalling poverty, rampant crime and corruption, the devastating epidemic of AIDS and the emigration of many professional people. These are problems the Church must now learn to grapple with, even as it holds up the ultimate hope of God's coming kingdom in a world where many despair.

As we look back on our church's history, its active support peaked during the 1950s and the 1960s, though large numbers continued to attend in the early 1970s. During the 1970s, like many other mainline churches, it lost numbers, and since 1979 it has remained the same in size. (The number of active enrolled members today is almost exactly the same as in 1979.) For the last year or more, however, church attendance seems to have been slowly growing again, though in fits and starts.

What are the reasons for this growth? I think some are:

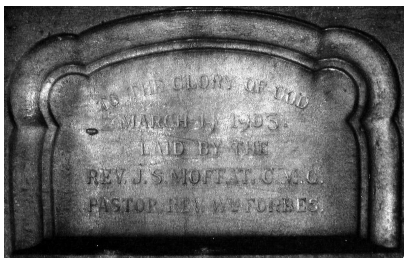
1. For many years the church's stand on apartheid and military service for an apartheid Government – indeed on whether the Church should take a stand on basic moral issues in the political arena at all – alienated more people than it attracted. This is even though our reputation was more radical than our reality! Since the political change in 1994, however, these questions have been less central and in any case less controversial.
2. The high roof in our church dissipates the sound of our singing. The devoted work of the choir and of Roselle Frasca and Sybil Lessing as choir mistresses since 1994 has done wonders for our singing, in volume and repertoire. Richard Moth's industrious and extraordinarily generous work on the organ has also been important. And so has the acquisition of an overhead screen. People make more noise when they sing with their heads up than with their noses buried in hymnbooks.
3. The marimbas so generously donated by Sybil Lessing have contributed a new vitality to our worship and given it something of an indigenous African flavour.
4. One of the most fundamental factors is the great work Robert Steiner and his helpers have done in reviving our Sunday School and for our youth, which has also brought families to church.
5. A regular group of members now meets on Saturday mornings to pray for renewal and revival.
6. At last we have a notice-board in front of our church that is clearly legible to the passing traffic.
7. Standing on the steps of the sanctuary instead of in the pulpit, with as few notes as possible and nothing between me and the congregation, has helped my preaching to communicate better.

We hope, then, that our congregation will grow as we move into the future. Meanwhile let us continue to be faithful, as our spiritual forefathers were. Let us witness to the Jesus Christ as Lord over the whole of life in our troubled society; let us seek to share the grace of God with others and draw them into the worship and fellowship of his Church; but above all let us walk closely to God and care for one another and those in need. May that be our vision as we face the future together!

# A WALK AROUND OUR CHURCH BUILDING

DOUGLAS BAX

In front of our church now stand two notice boards, one in English and one in Chinese<sup>1</sup>. The original notice-board was presented to the church by members of relatives of John Philip (1775-1851) ‘to attract the attention of all passers by’. Philip was the famous Scottish Congregationalist minister whom the London Missionary Society (LMS) sent out to superintend its missions in the Cape.<sup>2</sup>



Foundation stone laid on 14 March 1903 by the Rev. J.S. Moffat, CMG

A person who comes into the grounds and pauses outside the church building may notice the foundation stone on its front corner. This was laid on 14 March 1903 by ‘the Rev. J.S. Moffat, CMG<sup>3</sup>’. We still possess the inscribed silver trowel he used. John Smith Moffat was the son (and biographer) of the LMS missionary Robert Moffat, another Scot, of Presbyterian origin, who worked from 1821 to 1870 at Kuruman among the Tswana and translated the Bible into Setswana. J.S. Moffat himself worked as a missionary among the amaNdebele under Mzilikazi at Nyati in Rhodesia and later assisted Robert at Kuruman and worked at Vryburg.<sup>4</sup> His sister married David Livingstone, the doctor, missionary and explorer. The foundation stone also names William Forbes as the

‘Pastor’ at the time.

Entering through the handsome front wooden doors into the main vestibule of the church, one faces, set into the opposite wall, the gravestone of Dr Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp, the ‘Faithful, Zealous and Learned Missionary of Jesus Christ’. Van der Kemp had been a captain of dragoons, an army doctor and a courtier to the Prince of Orange. Losing his wife and daughter in crossing a river by boat led to his dramatic conversion, after which he

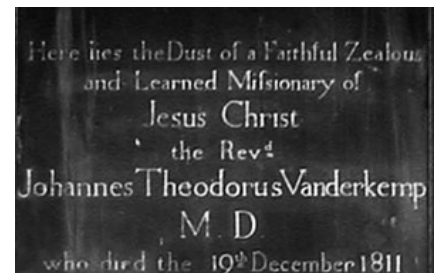


Image of part of the gravestone of Dr Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp

he became a minister, theologian and author. He volunteered to work as a missionary for the LMS and came out to the Cape in 1799, while it was occupied by Britain during the war against revolutionary France. He worked for 12 years among the Xhosa on the eastern frontier and the Khoikhoi at Graaff Reinet and Bethelsdorp, and died in 1811 at the age of 64. When the old cemetery east of Somerset Road in the city was being demolished in 1907, his gravestone was rescued and cemented into the vestibule wall.

Van der Kemp, Philip, Robert Moffat and Livingstone all worked for the London Missionary Society and were four of the most notable missionaries in the history of southern Africa. Van der Kemp, Philip and Livingstone were also the most controversial, because of their struggle for human rights. Van der Kemp was hated by the Dutch farmers, because he preached that all people were equal, regardless of colour, and identified so closely with his flock, dressing, eating and living like them; he also provided Khoikhoi deprived of their land with a refuge from enforced labour on the farms and wanted to educate them. Philip was not only ‘an unflinching advocate of Christian missions’ but ‘an unwearied friend

<sup>1</sup> See the picture on the frontispiece.

<sup>2</sup> Among the founding members of the church were four surnamed Philip. Two of these, Kate and Meta Philip, were granddaughters of John Philip. Later descendants include Margery Gandar, née Philip, his great granddaughter, who was a member of our church from 1924 to 1985, and Wendy Russell, née Philip, his great, great granddaughter, who was a member from 1954 to 1985, with an intervening absence, and is now Church Secretary of the Claremont Congregational Church.

<sup>3</sup> Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.

<sup>4</sup> J. Wing and R. Briggs: *The Harvest and the Hope* (Johannesburg: UCCSA, 1950), p.67-68,70-71, 177,181.

of the oppressed'<sup>5</sup>. In England he was acclaimed as 'the Wilberforce of Africa', but in South Africa Lord Charles Somerset and others damned him for 'mingling himself' in political issues.<sup>6</sup> The indomitable Philip's riposte to such critics was 'Nothing is *politics* for them but the advocacy of the rights of the oppressed!'<sup>7</sup>

On the wall just to the left of the gravestone is a small grey plaque declaring that the front doors were given in memory of Noel Tarrant (minister of the congregation from 1939 to 1968) and his wife Jess by their son Hadan. The doors were dedicated on Sunday 3 September 1978. Below the gravestone stands a handsome oak table that was once the Communion Table in the Caledon Square Congregational Church. Lady L.E. Smith donated this and the matching chair to the church in 1932 (though the church gave her £6 in return). It served as our Communion Table until 1975, when a new solid-fronted Table was bought, and the old Table was placed in the vestibule.

On then turning right one enters a smaller vestibule with two windows in the north wall commemorating the golden wedding of David and Mary Charlotte Mudie on January 1904. Mary must have been a wonderful wife, as her window is inscribed, 'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all!'

On finally entering the sanctuary, one passes under a clock given to the church by Ken Tait, a member of the church from 1972 until he died in 1998 and an accountant who served it for many years as treasurer and then auditor. The first stained glass window one then sees to the right is in memory of a nephew and namesake of John Philip. There are altogether four splendid windows in the west wall. They depict St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John and, underneath, the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle of Rev.4:6-9, which were taken in medieval times to denote the four evangelists. The four windows are respectively in memory of John Philip (1820-1883), his wife Margaret (née Cameron) Philip (1820-1890), Mary Anna Cameron (1834-1883) and John Yeoman (1857-1904). This John Philip was the son of Thomas, who was a brother of the famous missionary, and

was himself mayor of Cape Town in 1877-78. Mary Anna Cameron must have been Margaret Philip's sister (or sister-in-law). The Cameron girls' father was James Cameron, a missionary in Madagascar.

On the wall between two of the windows is an icon of Jesus Christ robed in white and enthroned as *Pantokratōr* ('Ruler of all'). Shenouda III, Patriarch of the See of St Mark in Alexandria and Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, presented the icon to our church when it entertained him to a meal in 1997. This was after a party of South African Christians including members of our congregation had visited Egypt in February that year and enjoyed the hospitality of the Coptic Church. Beyond the windows is a simple grey cross given by Jess Tarrant and

dedicated to the memory of her husband, Noel Tarrant.

In front, on the south end of the church, on a massive concrete shelf, stands a magnificent set of silver-painted organ pipes. Below the shelf is a large Maltese cross set against the wall as though holding up the shelf and the organ. This entire wall and the rooms on the other side of it were rebuilt in 1974-75. Before that the organ stood forward of the wall on a large panelled box, and the wooden panelling along the sides of the church extended along the front wall.

The present free-standing pulpit and the solid-fronted Communion Table, both of light oak, were bought in 1975. Behind the Table stand 7 oak chairs. The central chair was the one that once belonged to the Caledon Square Congregational Church along with the table now in the vestibule. Of the 6 deacons' chairs four were given 'In memory of Bronwen Fourie, beloved daughter of George and

Mary Vaughan' and sister of Dr Betty Vaughan, who is still a member. Bronwen was tragically killed in 1960 when a motor car in which she was a passenger hit a lorry without lights at night near Faure. The other two chairs were given 'In memory of Kate Hilda Holden, beloved wife of E.J. Holden', who died in 1962. On the east side of the Table stands the baptismal font, with a small brass plate on its oak stand that reads: 'In loving memory of Rev<sup>d</sup> James Good, for 40 years missionary in Bechuanaland, Dec.1, 1913'. James Good worked mainly at Kanye among the BaNgwaketse, winning their lasting respect and affection. Some of the most popular Tswana hymns were translated by him.<sup>8</sup> After his retirement he



Icon of Jesus Christ enthroned as *Pantokratōr* ('Ruler of all'). Presented in 1997 by Shenouda III, Patriarch of the See of St Mark in Alexandria and Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church

<sup>5</sup> The quoted words are from Philip's memorial tablet in the oldest Congregational Church in Cape Town.

<sup>6</sup> H. Davies: Great South African Christians (London: OUP, 1951), p.9.

<sup>7</sup> H. Davies: op. cit., p.13.

<sup>8</sup> J. Wing and R. Briggs: The Harvest and the Hope, p.171-72.

came to the Cape and attended this congregation.<sup>9</sup> (John de Gruchy is planning to make a more imposing stand for the font; the plate will then be screwed onto it.)

On the east side of the church stands the sunken organ console. Just behind the organ bench a plaque on the wall states that additions to the organ were made ‘through the generosity of Celia Thorne, a faithful member of this church’, listing the stops, and giving the date, 1929. Below that another plaque states that the organ was rebuilt in memory of Arthur

Leonard Johnson, ‘a member of the choir for 65 years, 1975’. In the east wall above these plaques are set another four fine stained glass windows. The first from the left depicts the Good Shepherd and is in memory of Bertha Mary Johnson (1877-1945). The fourth window depicts Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life and is in memory of her husband, Arthur Leonard Johnson (1887-1970). Below Jesus is the **XP** (*chiro*)



View of the Sanctuary

sign, the traditional abbreviation of Christ in Greek. Just below the **XP** is a phoenix rising up out of fire. The phoenix was a mythical bird fabled to set fire to its nest, die and emerge again from its own ashes. Early Christian art began using it as a symbol of the resurrection. The second window depicts the Good Samaritan and is in memory of William and Ellen Thorne (d.1917) and their daughter Celia (d.1928). The third, immediately behind the organ console, depicts St Cecilia, the patron saint of music, and her martyrdom. It is inscribed ‘In loving memory of my darling wife Jocelin Myra van Ravensteyn 1902-1970’.

In the north-east corner of the church are brass plaques in memory of four people: Edwin James Holden (1882-1969) and his wife Kate Hilda Holden (1885-1962), ‘for twenty years a devoted worker in this church’, Professor Herbert Greenwood (1903-1983), life deacon and for 22 years honorary organist and choirmaster, and Thomas Arthur Green (1899-1983), ‘who served this church for 42 years’ *inter alia* as Church Secretary, or chief deacon, for 23 years. Suspended against the back

wall is a colour-washed wall-hanging made and decorated at a workshop of 80 people on Christianity and healing held at our church in August 2000. It hangs there to remind us of our responsibility to care for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. On the other side of the wall-hanging a plaque commemorates the provision of tubular pew heaters in 1947 by the Lilian Goodspeed Bequest ‘to the church she loved’.

Beyond the glass doors in the north east corner of the church is another small vestibule or foyer, now appointed to be both a Memorial Room and a babies’ cry room. In it are two smaller windows with brass plates set in the wall ‘In loving Memory of the Revd William Forbes, First Pastor of this Church, Who entered into Rest 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1911’ and of his wife Rebecca and her children, Ernest Everley and Frances Elizabeth, ‘whom God has taken to Himself’. When the doors from the two side vestibules leading into the

church are left open during the day, the four windows in them light up that end of the church with colour.

Alongside the Forbes windows is a plaque in memory of Bertha Mary Johnson (1877-1945), in whose memory the old ‘church bells’ apparatus was given. Across the corner, on the east wall, a brass plate declares the room to be a Memorial Room. On the same wall are brass plates, in memory of Pat Fraser (1911-1995), who went as a missionary from England to Freetown in Sierra Leone. There she met and married Arthur Fraser, who brought her to Cape Town, where they joined our church in 1941, so that she ‘loved and served this church faithfully for 54 years’. Arthur himself served the church for very many years as a deacon and treasurer. Other plaques are in memory of Elizabeth Anne Penney (1953-1997), ‘deacon and choir member’, and Jean Chase (1933-1999), ‘Sunday School teacher and deacon’.

All these names remind us that we are but the latest generation in the history of the congregation. So we turn now to that story.

<sup>9</sup> Three other members of the Good family later joined our church in the 1920s and 1930s.



# THE STORY OF OUR CHURCH

SHAAN ELLINGHOUSE AND DOUGLAS BAX

*Shaan Ellinghouse was a radar operator in Devon during World War II and came to South Africa after the war. She eventually became confidential secretary to David Graaff. She has been a member of our church since 1962 and was a leader in the WA and a deacon for some years. She is Pledge Secretary, banker for the church and co-convenor of the Friendship Club. She also sings in the choir. She was married to James Ellinghouse, was widowed, and has one son named Jeremy.*

W

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' (Heb.11:1 NIV).

## BACKGROUND

War broke out again between France, now under Napoleon, and Britain in 1803. As a result in 1806 Britain reoccupied the Cape, this time more permanently. The occupying troops included the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Sutherland Highlanders, many of whom were devout Presbyterians. Though without chaplain, in they formed a 'Calvinist Society' that for prayer, Bible and public worship – and invited any passing missionaries to preach for them. In 1812 George (later Dr) Thom, a minister of the Church of Scotland arrived on his way to India as a missionary. They persuaded him to stay and be their minister, and a Presbyterian congregation was formally constituted under his care. But in 1814 the battalion transferred to India, leaving only 24 soldiers and 3 civilians, and Thom later accepted a call to the Dutch Reformed Church in Caledon.

In 1819 the LMS sent John Philip to superintend its



Shaan Ellinghouse

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growing work in Southern Africa. Philip was based in Cape Town, and what was left of the congregation invited him to conduct services for it. His stirring sermons boosted attendance, and in 1820 it offered him a call. Philip, however, was a committed Congregationalist and would accept the call only if meetings of the congregation replaced the kirk session (church council) as the governing body. For the sake of gaining a minister the congregation agreed. Many members intended that it should remain a Presbyterian church, though with a modified form of government. When the congregation built a church on the LMS property on Church Square near the Groote Kerk, this was named 'Union Chapel' in recognition that its roots were both Presbyterian and Congregational.<sup>10</sup> In fact, however, this is how the first Congregational church, the 'parent church' of Congregationalism in South Africa, came to be born – out of a Presbyterian one! The congregation later built the Caledon Square Congregational Church, but then in 1907 closed this down and joined Trinity Congregational Church in the Gardens (first started in 1897) to become the Union Congregational Church in Kloof Street.<sup>11</sup>

When the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1824 offered financial help to build Presbyterian churches in the colonies, dissatisfied Presbyterians broke away and built the 'Scottish Church', now St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, on Somerset Road in the city. As Cape Town spread southwards, Congregationalists and Presbyterians then leapfrogged one another. A Presbyterian Sunday School and later a church were opened in Woodstock, a Congregational church in Observatory (1894), a Presbyterian church in Mowbray (1897) and a Congregational church in Claremont (already in 1840).

## BEGINNINGS

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Congregationalists were talking of starting a church in Rondebosch.

<sup>10</sup> The site of Union Chapel is marked with a circular concrete disc on the wall of the present building on the site in the south-east corner of Church Square.

<sup>11</sup> J. Wing and R. Briggs: *The Harvest and the Hope*, p. 213, and a 'Short History of the Church' drafted on behalf of the Union Congregational Church for Radio Fish Hoek. The latter document, however, has some of its facts wrong.

But nothing came of this, until a few people approached William Forbes, a Congregational minister who had recently returned to the Cape in the pay of the Colonial Missionary Society. They offered to guarantee the expenses for a few months, if he would conduct services until it was clear whether a church would be viable. Mr Forbes agreed. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was being waged at the time, but that, of course, did not mean that people should be any less diligent in worship.

A committee was formed. Its earliest recorded minute is headed 'Meeting to organize for Church Services Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> 1900' and states, (see copy of original on page 24).

On Thursday Decr 6<sup>th</sup> 1900 the following gentlemen viz. Wm Thorne Esq, H. Wilman Esq, Hon. C.W. Hutton, M.S.A.W. Thomson Esq, Hugh Beattie Esq, W.F. Wood and Polhemeus Lyon met with Rev W. Forbes at office of W Thorne Esq to organize as a committee for the conduct of Congregational Church Services at the Rondebosch Town Hall during months of December 1900 – January and February 1901.

William Thorne (who was sometime mayor of Cape Town) was appointed chairman of the meeting. By this time Hugh Beattie and Polhemeus Lyon had approached the Town Council and hired the Town Hall for Sunday morning and evening services for a preliminary period of 3 months from 9 December, at £2.2.0 a week. A 'little organ' (harmonium) had also been obtained with the right to return it after 3 months. The committee resolved to begin services on 9 December and 'to take up collections at each service toward expenses', including Mr Forbes's stipend. Advertisements and press notices had already been prepared for the newspapers, and 2000 handbills and 50 large posters printed. The committee agreed that the handbills be distributed 'through the adjacent neighborhoods' [*sic*] the next day and the posters be put up.

On Sunday 9 December 1900 the pioneering members duly met in the Town Hall for the founding service of the Rondebosch Congregational Church. The Caledon Square and Claremont churches kindly loaned hymnbooks, and an effort had been made to organise a choir. William Forbes conducted the service. On this first Sunday 135 people attended in the morning and 83 in the evening, and services were held every Sunday from then on. An address to the children was included each morning. The first Communion service was held on 30 December, with plate borrowed from the Claremont Church. The average attendance during December was 75 (i.e. altogether 150 a Sunday!). (No service was held on Christmas Day.) The total income from collections during December, including one quarterly subscription, came to

£28.14.10.

The organizing committee next met on 10 January 1901. It resolved on a monthly salary of £25 for Mr Forbes and 'that a Communion Service be held on the last Sunday of each month'. On 11 February Mr Forbes reported that he was having a leaflet printed to advertise the topics for the services and would mail this to all residents near the Town Hall. A card of this kind from April 1901 survives and is of interest for the topics he planned to preach on:

<u>April 7</u>	
Morning	'The Apparent Indifference of God'
Evening	'The Everlasting Gospel'
<u>April 14</u>	
Morning	'The Possibilities of Human Nature'
Evening	'The Sinfulness of Sin'
<u>April 21</u>	
Morning	'Nowadays'
Evening	'An Ancient Athlete'
<u>April 28</u>	
Morning	'Jacob's Well'
Evening	'The Bystanders at Calvary'

The card also states that 'on Sunday, April 28, the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper will be celebrated, immediately after the morning service.' (Many Protestants at the time thought of Communion as an appendage to the main service.) The first two baptisms also took place in April 1901. We still have and use the Baptismal Register that was used then. Later a Mr Wilman generously presented a Communion set to the church.

Attendances increased from an average of 75 in December and January to 80 in February and March and 93 in April. Later they were 74 in May and 89 in June. A press cutting from this period comments: 'the services in the Rondebosch Town Hall are attracting considerable interest. The Committee are so far encouraged as to secure the hall for a further term, and have arranged for a choir practice, which will add to the effectiveness of this part of the worship.'

On 3 April the committee made two important decisions: to call a meeting of the congregation after the services on Sunday 21 April to decide whether the congregation should be constituted and organized as 'a regular church', and to solicit subscriptions to cover the shortfall in funds, so that the new church could start off debt-free.

The meeting of the congregation on 21 April 1901 duly constituted itself as 'The Rondebosch Congregational Church' and appointed the committee to be its 'Board of Managers', with Sir William Thorne as chairman. The first Secretary and also Treasurer was Arthur Lewis.

A Church Roll Book was ordered from a firm of



Sir William Thorne, First Chairman of the Board of Managers

binders and inscribed with the names of the 46 foundation members. Heading the list were Hugh and Emily Beattie and Lord and Lady William Thorne and their daughter Miss Celia Thorne. Four others were surnamed Philip, two being granddaughters of John Philip, the missionary, and the other two presumably relatives as well.

A meeting of the congregation on 6 April 1902 took the bold step of authorizing the purchase of the site on Belmont Road for the building of a church at a cost of £2 220. It also resolved that a Ladies' Committee be set up to devise ways to raise funds for the building. (How much the church was to count on the women in this way throughout its history!) What is amazing is that no more than 47 full members were on the Roll of the congregation at this time. These pioneers certainly showed great faith in what God could do through them!

Thomas H. Hitchin was asked to design the new church. He submitted plans on 8 August 1902. They would, he wrote, provide 231 seats for the congregation and 50 for the choir, and the church might 'easily be extended in the future to provide for a congregation of 500 or more'. The cost was to be £3 000 plus £320 for seating, pulpit, communion table, etc. A note added that this estimate was based on 'the very high prices that are ruling in these days'!

The foundation stone was laid on Saturday 14 March by John Smith Moffat. The cost of building turned out to be £4 377, a large amount in those days. The congregation raised £650 toward this at a 'Great Fair' in the Town Hall in October. The building was completed by the end of November. It was officially opened with a service on Wednesday 2 December 1903, at which the guests included four ministers, and a public meeting in the Town Hall that evening, at which the Hon. Sir John Buchanan, K.B.<sup>12</sup>, presided and the various ministers gave four addresses. The vision of the founders was being realized! To raise further money the church decided in December 1903 to introduce 'pew rents' of 10s a half year, payable on 1 January and 1 July. This was a common way of raising money at the time. An early record records that there were 20 'seat holders'.

The first marriage to be solemnized in the church was that of Miss Annie Hewat in December 1903. A special Bible was presented to mark the occasion. We still have the first marriage register. In mid-1904 William Forbes married a widow named Rebecca with two children, Ernest and Frances. Arthur Lewis, as Secretary of the church, in his annual report in 1904, stated that 'Mrs Forbes is just what we wanted'!

In 1904 a pipe organ was brought out from Norwich, England.<sup>13</sup> It was used for the first time on Sunday 17 April 1904.

Church attendance went up. In 1904 the two services per Sunday averaged a combined 123. The average total collection averaged £7 15s 8d. The following year, however, attendance dropped slightly to an average of 115,

and the collection right down to an average of £2 10s 2d.

The windows in the north wall commemorating the golden wedding of David and Mary Mudie on January 1904 were donated that year. Not long afterwards the Philip family presented the stained glass windows in the west wall of the church and the 'handsome and useful Notice Board' in front of the church. A few years later the windows commemorating the Revd William Forbes as the First Pastor of the church and his wife Rebecca and her children were set in the north wall.

The first Young People's Guild was started in 1905, and a Literary Union in 1910.

The first deacons seem to have been elected at the beginning of 1907. Thereafter the Committee of Management met as the Committee of Management and Deacons.

In September 1911 William Forbes died. The congregation had lost its pioneering pastor.

## EARLY YEARS

A succession of brief ministries followed for the next 10 years. J. Martin Dower served from 1911 to 1912, J. Gould-Layton from 1913 to 1914, Mearns Massie from 1915 to 1917 and Frederick Conquer from 1918 to 1920. The shortness of all these ministries must have disrupted the congregation and inhibited its consolidation. Its size can be gathered from the fact that in 1914 the Church Roll listed 79 members, '50 being active and 29 absent'. Members and adherents together numbered 160. A Sunday School with 5 teachers and 40 white scholars met regularly on Sunday afternoons in the church. During Frederick Conquer's ministry a Diaconate replaced the old Committee of Management.

Aggravating the unsettled state of the congregation, World War I broke out in 1914. As many as 43 young men from the congregation enlisted for active service. Sadly, 9 never returned.

In spite of this a hall was built behind the church and opened with a ceremony and a concert on 7 December 1915. It was named the Thorne Memorial Hall in memory of Sir William Thorne, who had remained a staunch supporter of the church since its foundation. Six months later a kitchen was added. The hall came to be in constant use for Sunday School, badminton and many other activities.

An early, undated scale of fees was:

Minister's Fee	£2. 2. 0d.
Use of Church	£1. 1. 0d.
Use of Hall	10. 6d.
Caretaker	5. 0d.

For this princely sum of 5s 0d the Caretaker had, amongst other things, to dust the pews well and the pulpit chair. Be in attendance at both services, open and light the church during the week if necessary and attend at choir practice. Sweep and dust Vestry every morning and have ready for the Minister's use not later than 9.30.

In 1919 the first issue of the first church magazine, *The Church Record*, appeared.

<sup>12</sup> Knight of the Bath or Knight Bachelor.

<sup>13</sup> For the story of the organ see the article by Richard Moth on page 21.

In 1921 J.H. Atkinson was called to succeed Frederick Conquer. The church purchased the house at 1 Glebe Terrace for him to use as a manse the same year.

In that year too the congregation elected its first women members to the Committee of Management.<sup>14</sup> (The organizing group at this time still met as 'the Deacons and Committee' of the church.)

In 1922 a Badminton Club was formed in the hall. It is recorded that 'this marked the introduction of the sport of Badminton to South Africa'!

In 1924/25 the Literary Union was revived with a series of 10 lectures.

In 1925 the stone wall along the boundary on Belmont Road was erected and pathways were laid to the front door, greatly improving the frontage to the church. Mrs A.H. Johnson and the Women's Association collected £150 to pay for this. In 1926-27 the vestries at the back of the church were enlarged.

At the end of 1926 J.H. Atkinson resigned as minister. In January the next year the church called George Ferguson to be its new minister.

Mr Ferguson introduced a monthly printed leaflet containing a personal letter, an 'admonition' and a list of the month's engagements, including the services. This reached the home of every member before the first Sunday of each month. Attendance increased. After his first year he had this to say:

The strength of a church is revealed in the Sunday attendances. Judged by this standard we are weak, but are improving. I keep a record of numbers. A year ago I had to be content with an attendance in the neighbourhood of 60, now I regard anything below 100 at either service as poor.

In 1928 Miss Celia Thorne died, and the church placed on record its appreciation of her life and service as one of its most loyal members ever since its foundation. The following year the Thorne family donated money for a stained glass window in the east wall of the church in memory of 'William and Ellen Thorne 1917 and their daughter Celia 1928'. This window, depicting the 'Good Samaritan', was unveiled in 1930. It was thought then that our church had the most artistic windows in South Africa.

In 1929 the Women's Association, which had raised most of the money to pay off the bond on the manse in Glebe Terrace, celebrated the final payment with a ceremony in which it handed over of the manse's property deeds to the church.

In 1929 the church bought copies of the new *Congregational Hymnary*. The choir at this time was 25 strong. It was long before the days of TV!

In the same year the church showed its ecumenical spirit by joining with Mowbray Presbyterian Church in starting united services in Pinelands.

In 1930 Ruth and John Perry presented a pair of brass

***In 1929 the church bought copies of the new Congregational Hymnary. The choir at this time was 25 strong.***

flower vases to the church in memory of their grandmother, Mrs E.S. Crowder, who enrolled as a member in 1929 only to die in a motor car accident a year later. Mrs J.H. Johnson presented a new stove and utensils to the kitchen.

George Ferguson's last two years at Rondebosch were plagued by illness, and various ministers and lay preachers had to help out with the services. The illness worsened, and Mr Ferguson resigned at the end of 1931.

In June 1932 Thomas Downham of Durban was called. He was a gifted minister, who aroused fresh interest in the church. His wife Lilian established a precedent when she was ordained and appointed co-pastor in 1935.

During the last quarter of that year the congregation adopted a new constitution. It also replaced the system of pew rents with a 'freewill offering' or pledge scheme, with envelopes for regular offerings distributed to all who pledged. This scheme has continued until today.

Unhappily Mr Downham's health also deteriorated, and he resigned the pastorate from August 1938.

## THE TARRANT YEARS

Call was sent to W. Noel H. Tarrant, who had served the Pearson Street Congregational Church in Port Elizabeth for 15 years. He arrived in 1939. The church sold the old manse in Glebe Terrace in the same year and bought a new manse at 16 Weltevreden Avenue at a cost of £2 140. Mr Tarrant's much longer ministry brought a long period of consolidation and growth.

Meanwhile the congregation had shown its commitment to ecumenism. At a meeting in 1935 already it had agreed to the principle of union with the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. In July 1939 a Special Church Meeting now resolved to support the plan for union between the three denominations meanwhile drafted.

At the end of the financial year in 1940 the church was able to show a credit balance for the first time since its founding!

In 1941 James A. Giffen donated the money for a hall to be built in memory of his wife Mary. The Giffens had been members since 1929 and used to walk to our church every Sunday with their children from Mowbray, where they lived near an open field. The Mary Giffen Memorial Hall (which now adjoins the west end of the main hall) was mainly for the use of the Primary Department of the Sunday School, but was also used for Church Meetings until the new Minor Hall was opened in 1958. In 1943 Mr Giffen endowed £100, the interest on which was to pay for the maintenance of the hall.

In 1941 the church installed earphones in the pews and in 1942 a new roof over the church vestibule. In 1943 the Johnson brothers provided an endowment of £1000 in memory of their mother, Mrs J.A. Johnson, the interest to be drawn annually. In 1947 the tubular heating system

<sup>14</sup> How progressive this was is shown by the fact that by contrast it was only in 1966-67 that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa first approved the election of women elders!

from which the congregation still benefits was installed with a bequest from Lilian Goodspeed.

The same year Arthur and Bertha Johnson donated the record-playing apparatus that was placed in the north east vestibule with loudspeakers in the tower above. It played the sound of church bells for the first time on Christmas Day 1945. Later, in 1967, the apparatus was reconstructed to play tapes as well. It remained there until 1996, when the vestibule was converted into a babies' cry room. It is now stored under the stage in the hall. Three years later Arthur Johnson donated the stained glass window in the east wall in memory of his wife Bertha.

The old roof of the church was replaced with a new shingle roof in 1948.

The church celebrated its Golden Jubilee in December 1950 with a Christmas party that was then made an annual event.

A new bi-monthly *Newsletter* was started in the latter half of 1952. This was edited for 3 years by Mr E.J. Holden and then for 14 by Mrs W. Wright.

It was under Mr Tarrant's ministry, in the 1950s and stretching through the 1960s, that the congregation reached its greatest size. Many organizations were started during this time. From 1946 to 1949 especially there was a very active Men's Association. The congregation had many students and young people in it. In 1950 the Young People's Fellowship was revived and by 1953 had grown to be 70 strong. In 1955 the Sunday School totalled 169 children and the choir 25. There was also a strong 'Girls Auxiliary'. The Rondebosch Congregational Dramatic Society was started in 1956, and the Recorded Music and Photographic Societies in 1960. The Rondebosch Seniors' Club began weekly meetings in the hall in 1959. The choir was also very strong. In 1953 the church bought copies of the new hymnbook, *Congregational Praise* (first published in 1951), and placed them in the pews.

In 1958 the New Hall, which replaced the Thorne Hall, was completed at a cost of £15,256 and opened. It was built by D.A. McLachlan & Co.<sup>15</sup> Twenty years later,



Foundation Stone of the Tarrant Hall laid by Noel Tarrant in 1957

**Rondebosch Congregational Church thus became the first church in South Africa at which a banned person preached.**

in 1978, it was to be named the Noel Tarrant Hall.

On Sunday 22 March 1959 the church broadcast its first service on the SABC.

In December that year the church celebrated its Diamond Jubilee with special services.

In 1966 repeated attempts to break into the church led to the burglar bars being fitted to the vestry windows. In 1969 Miss H. Humphries donated the handrails on either side of the front entrance of the church. The same year a strong-room was built under the stage in the hall to store the church's records.

On 3 October 1967, in a packed church in Durban, representatives of the old Congregational Union of SA (of which this church was a part), the Bantu Congregational Church (originally established in Natal by the American Board of Mission) and the London Missionary Society (now largely in Botswana and Zimbabwe) made a solemn Act of Covenant by which these all merged to form the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). The united Church comprised over a 100 000 enrolled members, besides adherents, catechumens and Sunday School scholars. The first UCCSA Assembly was held in the Rondebosch Congregational Church that year.

A year later Mr Tarrant retired, greatly respected and loved. He was appointed Minister Emeritus in the congregation and continued a faithful member in it until he died 8 years later.

## THE 'STRUGGLE' YEARS

In that same year, 1968, Geoffrey Dunstan was called from north London to be minister. He arrived with his wife Jocelyn and two daughters before the year was up. (A third daughter was born in 1970.) The story is told that the day after he arrived, Arthur Green appeared on the manse doorstep as Church Secretary to instruct Geoffrey in detail what his agenda for the week ahead should be!

The new minister was much younger than his predecessor and a quite different personality. As a younger man, he brought new ideas and new energy. Three things particularly were features of his ministry. One was the style of worship he introduced, a style that was more conscious of liturgical principles. But the most memorable liturgical event during his time happened at the Easter Service in 1969. Mrs Jo Dunstan, a very gifted person in her own right, produced a dramatic presentation called 'The Lord of the Dance', after Sydney Carter's hymn with that title, with dance, drama and music by members of the congregation. For many years afterwards those who were there talked about this service!

In another innovation Miss Iona McLeod in 1972 began a Junior Choir that came to have 15 members and charmed those at the morning services with anthems accompanied by guitar, harp, recorder and chime bars.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas A. McLachlan became a member in 1921. 80 years later his widow, Florence, was still a faithful member.

Iona kept this going for 7 years, until she emigrated early in 1979.

In 1973 Geoffrey persuaded the Diaconate to buy copies of the New English Bible (published in 1970) for all the pews. (This was paid for by a general appeal to the congregation.) In 1976 100 new copies of *Congregational Praise* were bought, and paid for by an anonymous donor. New falls for the pulpit and Holy Table were also procured. In 1978 Phyllis Greenwood also designed and made red velvet falls especially for Good Friday. The Table fall depicted the three crosses at Calvary, the 30 pieces of silver and the church as it were growing out of the top of the central Cross.

The second feature of Geoffrey Dunstan's ministry was his strong ecumenical interest. In 1972, during the time when there was a wave of ecumenical interest in South Africa, the congregation began occasional joint services and meetings with St Thomas' Anglican Church. National Services of Commitment to Unity were held in 1974 to celebrate the acceptance of the Declaration of Intention to Seek Unity by the Anglican, Congregational, Methodist and 3 Presbyterian Churches, and the local one was held in our church on 24 November. Clergy from four local denominations took part, and the service was broadcast.

Following this up Geoffrey and Christopher Gregorowski, the priest at St Thomas' Anglican Church, in 1976 began a weekly joint Anglican-Congregational Communion service at St Thomas' on Wednesdays at 8.45 a.m. At the same time Geoffrey began an office of daily prayers in our own church at 8.30 a.m., which was occasionally attended by women from St Thomas'. The joint Communion service was to last for 11 years, until 1987, when a new priest arrived at St Thomas' with no interest in ecumenical activities. Geoff also invited ministers and priests from other denominations, including the Catholic Church, to preach in our church.

The third particular aspect of Geoffrey Dunstan's ministry was the application of the gospel to social and political issues. As a minister who had come out from the Congregational Church in England he did not share the same racial assumptions as many white South Africans; instead he was motivated by the liberal Nonconformist English tradition. In 1969 the South African Council of Churches and the Christian Institute issued the *Message to the People of South Africa*, which condemned the ideology of apartheid as contrary to the gospel. The following year Geoffrey led a Church Meeting that discussed this and passed a resolution of support for it that was sent to the SACC and to the UCCSA Annual Assembly.

In 1972 a 'Samaritan Fund' for charitable purposes was also started as part of the congregation's budget. Later, in 1983, an 'Easter Self-Denial Offering' was launched: members were asked to donate money for a charity on Easter Sunday in special envelopes in lieu of giving up something for Lent. This practice has continued until the present.

On Sunday 6 November 1977, Geoffrey invited Theo Kotze, a Methodist minister who was leader of the

Christian Institute in the Cape, to preach. On 19 October, 11 days before the service was due, the Government served Theo with a banning order precluding him from speaking to more than one person at a time. But Theo did not regard preaching as subject to Government decree, and with the support of Geoffrey and the Diaconate went ahead with the appointment. Rondebosch Congregational Church thus became the first church in South Africa at which a banned person preached. The church was full. Several security police stationed themselves outside the church. Suspiciously, a little girl unknown in the congregation ran in with a tape recorder and sat near the front to tape the whole sermon and then left. Theo decided to forgo greeting people at the door in order not to provide an excuse for him to be charged for breaking his banning order in that way. As the congregation emerged, they found that the security police had ostentatiously set up a camera on a tripod across the road and were taking pictures of everyone who came out of church. That is, until a Methodist friend of the Kotzes, Emily Duffet, boldly walked across the road and stood right in front of the camera with her back to it, so that it could take no more photos!

There were other innovations. In 1972 Geoff Dunstan began a new church magazine named *Voice*, which he edited himself.

In 1970 a new constitution was adopted in terms of which the Diaconate, consisting of 8-12 elected deacons, a Church Secretary and a Treasurer, now took over from the old Management Committee as the executive body in the church. The church also began to employ its first part-time paid office secretary. A 'Coffee Bar' for young people was started and ran for 4 years. A stewardship campaign was undertaken, and a Bible study group formed.

In 1971 a large building project was initiated. It was decided to pull down the lean-to that housed two vestries on the south end of the church and rebuild that whole end of the church to house the organ and new vestries for the minister and the choir. Additional classrooms were also to be built for the Sunday School. To fund this a 'Talent Scheme' building fund was launched. The Dramatic Society produced a play called 'Noble Spaniard' in August 1971, which raised R1,000 for the building fund. In 1972 a fete raised R4,600; R900 was donated to the Border Council of Churches for developing home industries in Dimbaza and the rest went towards the building fund. Nevil Louw, a long-standing member of the congregation, was engaged as architect. He produced a model of the plans in 1974. These included a passage to connect the south end of the church with the hall, classrooms to be built on the present lawn and turning the church around, so that the entrance would be on the south side and the north end would be closed (cutting out most of the noise from the street). These parts of the plan were later abandoned.

The alterations finally began in 1974, the builder being Douglas A. McLachlan and the engineer Wynand Truter, both members of the church. When the old south end of the building was torn down, it was discovered that the church had hardly any physical foundation. (This has

sometimes been mentioned as exemplifying I Cor.3:11, that Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church!) The buttresses on the south end of the church had to be underpinned with brickwork and concrete to give them a firm base. A large concrete beam was built across the south wall, and the organ was consolidated in a new loft above this. Underneath the loft a church office, choir vestry and minister's vestry were built. The removal of the organ from in front of the south wall gave the sanctuary in front of the church much more space. Unfortunately a fine circular stained glass window above the organ had to be dispensed with. The new parts of the building were dedicated on 1 November 1975, at a special service conducted by Noel Tarrant.

Meanwhile in 1971 Geoffrey took over the ministry for the Pinelands Congregational Church as well as Rondebosch. In 1973-74 John de Gruchy, who was now teaching in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Cape Town and a member of the congregation, was formally appointed an Associate Minister of Rondebosch and Pinelands to assist him with these two congregations. Together they looked after both churches until 1975.

On 6 May 1973 the church commemorated the centenary of the death of David Livingstone with a special service. The cash offering was sent to the Congregational churches in Botswana.

The church hosted the 9th Assembly of the UCCSA, from 27 September to 2 October 1975. That same year, on 7 November, the church celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Bill Burnett, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, preached in the morning, and Edgar Hendricks, minister of the Gleemore Congregational Church and Chairman of the UCCSA, in the evening.

At the end of that year Robert Overmeyer retired after 15 years' service as caretaker.

In 1976 the Hall complex first began to be used as a daily creche when it was let to the University of Cape Town Nursery School. That same year the church appointed a young minister, Jim Cochrane, to its staff to work with teenagers. He worked part-time in the church for two years.

At the end of 1977 the church appointed Di Scott-Saddington part-time Youth Worker for young people between 14 and 17 years old. Under her enthusiastic ministry the group chose the name Charisma and over the next five years reached a peak in numbers that it has not since attained. Steve de Gruchy assisted Di from 1980 to the end of 1982. After she left at the end of 1982, he took over. Over these years attendance of this group varied between 8 and 40, depending on whether it was vacation or term-time for the boarders at Rondebosch Boys' High and Rustenburg Girl's High.

In 1978 Douglas Crawford, who had been minister at Mowbray Presbyterian Church from 1958 to 1970 and more recently had come under the impact of the

***In 1978 Douglas Crawford, who had been minister at Mowbray Presbyterian Church from 1958 to 1970 and more recently had come under the impact of the charismatic movement, conducted a mission in the congregation.***

charismatic movement, conducted a mission in the congregation. The mission meant much to several people in the congregation, including Geoffrey Dunstan.

Meanwhile, however, the number of people in the church had been decreasing for some time. There were various reasons for this, but one was Geoffrey's emphasis on social issues. He began to feel restless, and not very long after the mission accepted a call from the Bryanston United Church in northern Johannesburg. He and his family left on the last day of 1978.

At that time the UCCSA and the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA), as two denominations both in the Reformed tradition, were involved in serious negotiations to unite. This led to an agreement that while the negotiations were proceeding:

- any congregation could call a minister from either denomination; and
- all new congregations would be constituted as united congregations (Presbyterian + Congregational).

In September 1978, after Geoffrey had accepted the call to Bryanston, John de Gruchy attended an Assembly in Port Elizabeth and used the opportunity to visit Douglas Bax in Grahamstown to ask whether he would consider a call. Douglas was a Presbyterian minister he had known since they were students together and at this time a temporary lecturer in theology at Rhodes University. He agreed to consider a call, and John recommended to the Diaconate that it invite him to preach with this in view. Douglas had also been invited to lecture at the Federal Theological Seminary in Imbali near Pietermaritzburg and was inclined to accept this invitation, but his wife, Betty, pressed him to accept the invitation from Rondebosch. So he came – and preached a strongly political sermon that, he thought, would at least make clear where he stood. Afterwards at an informal get-together in his home Nevil Louw, then a deacon, asked Douglas whether he planned to lie down in front of the front-end loaders in protest against the demolition of shacks in the townships (as David, later Bishop, Russell had done). Douglas answered half-jokingly, 'Yes, and I expect the deacons to do the same!' Afterwards he thought that his sermon and this comment had sunk all chance that the congregation would call him. When, to his surprise, it then still decided to call him, he accepted. He, his wife Betty and their young son Michael arrived on 1 January 1979, the day after the Dunstan family had left, and he was inducted on 31 January 1979.

The number of people on the Roll at this time was well over 400, but many of these had actually died or left the church, and many names were now taken off as 'dead wood'. It was later worked out that the number of active members on the Roll at this time was actually 145.

Worship was also a concern to Douglas as a former student of the Church of Scotland expert on the history of

worship, Prof. William D. Maxwell. He sought to build on the work of Geoffrey Dunstan. But whereas Geoff had used a different set of printed versicles and responses each Sunday mainly at a point early in the service, Douglas proposed a form of worship in which versicles and responses were scattered throughout the service. His rationale was that this helped people to participate more actively in worship instead of being mere observers and encouraged the sense of worship as a corporate action of the people of God. The move was very controversial in a Congregational church, but a Church Meeting consented to give it a trial for 6 months. At the end of the 6 months a questionnaire was sent out. The church then had what was to be by far its biggest church meeting in a long time, with over 80 people attending. There was tension over the issue, but in the end, a compromise was agreed on: to retain only those particular versicles and responses that had won a large majority of support in the response to the questionnaire and abandon the rest. Another change that was retained was a modern version of the Lord's Prayer, though, as a compromise, it was agreed that the old version be sung occasionally. Unhappily, a few people who remained unhappy with any responses at all eventually left the congregation for this and other reasons.

In 1984 Douglas proposed that the church adopt the ecumenical hymn-book, *Hymns for Today's Church*, and, when the organist David Cherry gave his support, the church agreed. This hymnbook was distinctive in that it modernized the language in the traditional hymns it retained and also included a number of new, modern hymns. Some members were unhappy with the changed wording of older hymns, but the new book won general support.

In 1993 the church also agreed to replace the copies of the New English Bible in the pews with 100 copies of the Revised English Bible (published in 1989). Ken Tait very generously paid for these in memory of his wife Margaret. Kay Ford, also a very long-standing member, donated the large red REB pulpit Bible in memory of her husband, William Henry Ford (1902-1986). Ken Tait also donated R1000 towards a magnificent set of seasonal Table and pulpit falls, made at the Marianhill Monastery in Natal, also in memory of his wife Margaret.

Concern with social and political issues also continued. The main practical project the church ran during this time was initiated by Isobel de Gruchy and Jenny Boraine. They started a 'Centre of Concern' at the beginning of 1979 to teach domestic workers to sew and crochet and so enable them to make clothes for themselves and their families and to sell clothes to earn extra money. The Centre continued its work under Isobel's leadership in the Noel Tarrant Hall for 21 years until the end of 1999 and did tremendous work. It enrolled a total of up to 40 students a year at all levels in a three-year course. At the end of every year it presented a fashion show with its students modelling the garments they had made. All graduates were then presented with diplomas. Many women, some from outside our congregation, helped to run the Centre, but outstanding among them, besides Isobel

and Jenny, were Nola Kumm and Moira Gordon. It finally closed down when most domestic workers became no longer 'live-in maids' but daily chargs who lived in the townships and found travel expensive. Also, skills-training courses were now being set up in the townships. The Centre's final act was to donate all its sewing machines to Triple Trust, an NGO that trained unemployed people, to be used in co-operatives in the townships teaching women to earn a living with sewing.

In 1984 a group of members in the church also began a project offering English literacy classes to domestic workers. Some travelled long distances after work to attend thus, but after 2 or 3 years it petered out.

Meanwhile soon after Douglas Bax arrived in Rondebosch, in March 1979, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) held a national conference on the issue of apartheid for all its member Churches in South Africa. Douglas wrote and presented a long document for the PCSA debunking the Dutch Reformed Church's attempt to base apartheid on the Bible. The PCSA published this as a booklet later that year. In 1982 Allan Boesak used the booklet to get a congress of the WARC in Ottawa to charge the DRC with heresy and suspend it from membership in the Alliance. Douglas Bax had also in 1973 drafted a confession of faith against apartheid and affirming the lordship of Christ over the public as well as the private area of life. The PCSA adopted this as an actual subordinate standard of faith in 1986, and the congregation recited it from time to time as a confession of faith after the sermon.

The apartheid issue reared its head again when Mrs Jenny Vermeulen approached the church in 1979 with a request to hire its premises for a new weekday crèche for small children. The Diaconate agreed, but set a condition that the crèche be open to children of every colour. Jenny approved of this principle and courageously continued to practise it, with the church's support, as one application after another from us was turned down by the hierarchy of civic and government authorities, including, finally, Dr George Morrison, Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare 1984-85. The authorities apparently hesitated to close down the crèche, however, because of the unfavourable publicity that might result and we certainly would have resorted to, and in the end government policy itself changed. Margaret Spindler later took over the crèche, and in 1991 Stephanie Ketterer did.

On 12 October 1980 a special Church meeting adopted a revised constitution. The redrafted conditions for church membership in this eventually became, in slightly amended form, the conditions in the Model Constitution of the UCCSA and in the Model Constitution for United Presbyterian-Congregational Congregations. Unhappily, however, these conditions and the retention of a clause on church discipline led to the resignation of Dr J. Muir Grieve and his wife Barbara, former Quakers who had been stalwart, socially-concerned members for 40 years. Douglas Bax also persuaded the church to accept a change in the constitution that allowed political organizations whose policies were not contrary to the



gospel to hire, or use, its premises for meetings. This was to prove very significant in the years ahead.

Meanwhile the struggle over apartheid had raised questions about service in the South African Defence Force. In 1974, over 4 years before he came to Rondebosch, with Ds C.F. Beyers Naudé as his seconder, Douglas had proposed, and, after an impassioned debate that lasted several hours, persuaded the annual conference of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) to adopt, the 'Hammanskraal resolution on conscientious objection'. This resolution called on all member Churches to challenge their members to consider whether they should not

**Meanwhile Peter Moll, a brilliant and courageous young actuarial student, though a Baptist, had attended our church. At the end of 1979 he was arrested and put on trial by a military court in the Castle for objecting to serve in the army.**

object to military service, on the ground that the SADF was being used to maintain the unjust political system of apartheid. As a direct response the Government amended the Defence Act to include Section 121(c) forbidding anyone in any way to 'encourage, aid, incite, instigate [or] suggest' conscientious objection to anyone on pain of a fine up to R5 000 or imprisonment up to 6 years. In 1975 the staff of the SACC stymied an attempt by Douglas and Beyers to take the original resolution further. Nevertheless the resolution played a part in encouraging some young men to object to conscription and others to form what were called Conscientious Objectors' Support Groups (COSGs). Douglas Bax persuaded the Assemblies of the PCSA and the UCCSA to come out in support of conscientious objectors and tried to move them towards support of conscientious objection as such. He also spoke at meetings on the campuses of the Universities of Cape Town and of the Witwatersrand challenging the students to consider conscientious objection and at a special service in St George's Cathedral in support of conscientious objectors. Rondebosch Congregational Church became a central meeting place for the COSGs. The groundwork meetings to co-ordinate the COSGs and establish the End Conscription Campaign, which the Students' Union for Christian Action and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) helped organize, were held in our church hall. Debora Patta, a member of our church, was one person involved in the organizing.

Meanwhile Peter Moll, a brilliant and courageous young actuarial student, though a Baptist, had attended our church. (He was later an enrolled member, from 1984 to 1989.) At the end of 1979 he was arrested and put on trial by a military court in the Castle for objecting to serve in the army on 'just war' or what the Government called 'political' as distinct from pacifist grounds. (He was only the second such objector in South Africa.) A vigil was held in the church for him, and members of the congregation attended the trial in his support. His employer, the Old Mutual Life Assurance Company, however, fired Peter and demanded back the money it had spent on his bursary. Douglas Bax wrote a series of letters in the *Cape Times* attacking this as an act of blatant political support for the Nationalist Government. The

*Cape Times* gave prominence to the correspondence, and in the end the Old Mutual backed down completely. It even invited leaders of the Presbyterian Church, including its General Secretary (who flew down from Johannesburg), and Douglas to a parley and promised to reinstate Peter fully. When Peter himself came out of military prison at

the end of 1980, however, he felt he would be a marked man in the Old Mutual and did not return to it. Douglas then invited Peter to conduct a dialogue sermon with him by answering questions and so explaining his Christian motivation for being a c.o. This caused a record number of people to walk out of church: seven!

Most of them were persuaded not to leave the congregation, but some members did leave over the issue. Peter himself eventually married a Japanese student who had read of his stand and written to him and then came to South Africa. He later went to England to study for a doctorate in economics at Oxford and presently lives in the USA but visits Africa as an advisor to the World Bank on investments in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Other vigils, such as one over three days on 3-5 April 1980, were held in the church in support of Peter Moll and other objectors such as Richard Steel, a pacifist conscientious objector, and later for Charles Yeats, Harold Winkler, Steve de Gruchy, Frank Mallows and Chris Lund (pacifist objectors) and Charles Bester, David Bruce, Ivan Thoms and Peter Hawthorne (just war objectors who went to prison). Most but not all of these were practising Christians. Steve de Gruchy, Frank Mallows and Chris Lund were all members of our congregation. They objected to military service partly on just war grounds but legally on pacifist grounds, and so were sentenced to do community service. This involved years of labour at extremely low pay and often in difficult conditions.

Another person in the congregation involved in conscientious objection was Peter Plüddemann. He objected to bearing arms and was placed in the Castle as a non-combatant in 1986-87. While there he and three other conscripts became aware that its media centre was producing smear pamphlets in an orchestrated 'dirty tricks' operation against the ECC, Dr Ivan Thoms (a conscientious objector) and the United Democratic Front. The four of them tried to smuggle documents out to Archbishop Desmond Tutu to publicize. But one of the four betrayed the others, and they were detained under the Official Secrets Act on a charge of trying to disseminate 'secret documents'. Our church gave what moral support it could to Peter. The three were released after 3 weeks because of the legal support they received. In February 1988 they were tried by a military tribunal behind closed doors and sentenced to 18 months in military prison. Peter was also sentenced to be reduced to the ranks. Douglas Bax and a number of younger members of the church waited outside the tribunal. Douglas, John de Gruchy and Prof. J. Thomson from Stellenbosch then signed a joint

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Moll's *Reminiscences* on page 36.

letter in the *Cape Times* attacking the SADF for the conviction and the smear campaign. The three soldiers successfully avoided prison by an urgent application to the Supreme Court. They then challenged the conviction and sentence. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court. There the Chief of the Air Force argued that civil courts had no jurisdiction over actions of the military while martial law prevailed, and the Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, defended the actions of the SADF against the ECC as 'necessary military measures' for the 'efficient defence and protection' of the country.<sup>17</sup> He was also quoted as stating, 'When survival is at stake, no rules apply.'<sup>18</sup> Mr Sydney Kentridge, QC, replied that 'nothing could be more damaging to good government' than the army acting as it had done, that its 'dangerous assertion of power' was without precedent in South Africa and could be compared to 'the pretensions of a South American junta'. He pointed out that the army was acting as if there were a secret state of martial law, with none proclaimed.<sup>19</sup> The Supreme Court and finally, in 1992, the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein threw out the conviction on the grounds that the SADF could not be prosecutor and judge in the same case. The SADF then dishonourably discharged Peter.

**Steve and Debora bravely stood their ground and were arrested. Fiona was one of those who were badly beaten with plastic sjamboks.**

Meanwhile, after the original trial, Peter's *pro Deo* attorney, John van den Berg, gave details of the smear campaign against the ECC to the *Weekly Mail*, which in February 1988 courageously exposed the whole 'secret war' of the SADF against the ECC. The ECC used the information to file an affidavit with the Cape Supreme Court, which issued an injunction restraining the SADF from unlawfully interfering with its activities. This was a moral victory, even though the Government banned the ECC soon afterwards. Peter, and his future wife Marilyn Braam, were both elected deacons in our church in 1990.

Some years later a meeting of young and older supporters of the End Conscription Campaign in the Noel Tarrant Hall adopted a public resolution in which all agreed to defy conscription. The ECC organised a special service in our church in January 1986. A foreign TV team recorded some of the proceedings, showing *Nkosi Sikelele* being sung with some people making the clenched-fist salute. When this was shown on television, it upset some of our members. After 1994, however, the congregation itself was to sing *Nkosi Sikelele* in church, led by the choir!

About 1982 Tinus Nienaber organized a bus in which members of the congregation drove to Crossroads as an act of solidarity after the police had razed many homes there.

In 1983 four of our student members, along with a few other students, were arrested under the 'Illegal Gatherings Act 1973'. They were Margaret Worthington-Smith, Fiona McLennan, Tinus Nienaber and Mark Wilson. Their 'crime' was staging a protest and soliciting

signatures in Adderley Street for a petition against the forced removals of people from KTC to Khayelitsha. The police kept them for an afternoon in the cells at Caledon Square police station before letting them out on bail. They later had to pay R50 each on admission of guilt.

In June 1984 another small group of students including Tinus Nienaber, Steve de Gruchy<sup>20</sup> and Debora Patta<sup>21</sup>, all members of the congregation, were arrested for performing street theatre in protest against apartheid. (Debora Patta was the full-time paid co-ordinator for the Students' Union for Christian Action, or SUCA, in the Western Cape.)

They refused to pay admission of guilt fines and were put on trial in a Bellville court. The magistrate argued that as Christians they should abhor such protest because Romans 13 demanded submission to the Government. When Douglas Bax gave evidence in their favour and criticized the magistrate's interpretation of Paul's views on the relation between Church and State, the magistrate lost his cool and attacked him as "n twee-gat jakkals"! Debora, Steve and the others were fined and also received a suspended prison sentence of three months in jail, to be implemented if they were found guilty of participating in any illegal gathering during the next five years.

On 28th August 1985 Douglas Bax, Steve de Gruchy, Debora Patta, Fiona McLennan and Howard Pearce joined the 'March on Pollsmoor' from Athlone to protest against the continuing incarceration of Nelson Mandela. A contingent of police and armoured vehicles halted the marchers, and the police gave them 3 minutes to disperse. When they refused, the police fired teargas canisters and charged the marchers with long thick plastic 'sjamboks'. Douglas Bax just escaped arrest because there was one too few policemen to arrest all the clergy and nuns in the front row of the march! He then stood and watched what happened. Steve and Debora bravely stood their ground and were arrested. Fiona was one of those who were badly beaten with plastic sjamboks. Steve and Debora spent 5 days in prison and were then released on bail. The state then dropped the charges.

Meanwhile the political situation had been growing increasingly tense in the country. At one morning service Douglas denounced a state of emergency and its prohibition of any public discussion of its terms as a denial of the Lordship of Christ. Several people walked out of this service too. During 1985 informal 'Fellowship Services' were held in the minor hall on Sunday evenings. At the end of October 1985 one such Fellowship Service addressed the current situation in the country and agreed to ask for a meeting of the Diaconate to be called to consider the following proposals:

- that a letter be written to the press protesting on behalf of the church against the way in which the Government was dealing with unrest;

<sup>17</sup> *Cape Times*, 1.9.1988.

<sup>18</sup> This is quoted in a personal report about the case written by Peter Plüddemann's father on 7.2.1988.

<sup>19</sup> *Argus* 1.9.1988, *Cape Times* 2.9.1988.

<sup>20</sup> See also Steve de Gruchy's reminiscences on page 33.

<sup>21</sup> Debora Patta is now the chief investigative reporter and presenter of the television series '3rd Degree'.

- that the church bell be tolled at noon each day until all detainees were released and the state of emergency was lifted;
- that a banner be hung in front of the church with a text from Scripture addressing the situation;
- that our church twin with a black congregation.
- The Diaconate was called to a meeting that Friday and resolved:
- that a letter be written and delivered to the *Cape Times* that same night;
- that the bell be rung at noon for 5 minutes each day except Sundays;
- that the banner be hung; and
- that the possibility of twinning with a church in a black area be urgently investigated.

Douglas Bax suggested the text Isaiah 1:17, 'Seek justice, encourage the oppressed', but for fear that this might provoke rightwing people to damage the church it was decided that just the words 'Isaiah 1:17: Seek Justice' should be printed. Steve de Gruchy, as a member of SUCA on the UCT campus, offered to get it to make the banner. The letter, outlining all the above decisions and inviting other churches to join in the bell-tolling, was delivered to the *Cape Times*.

The Diaconate met again on Sunday 10 November. The banner was shown. The SUCA students had felt that 'Seek Justice' was too vague and had painted 'Seek justice, encourage the oppressed' on it. The Diaconate split down the middle about whether to hang the banner as it was or not. It finally referred the matter to a Church Meeting due 3 days later. The Church Meeting decided by 19 votes to 6 to display the banner and by 15 votes to 3 to display the full text. Nevil Louw as convener of the Finance and Property Committee was asked to check that the church was insured against damage from civil or political riot before it was put up. The *Cape Times* printed the letter, and the *Argus* printed a photograph of the banner on the church.

After the banner had been up for some days, a man telephoned the church threatening to bomb the church. Douglas Bax answered the telephone and let him rant on, while he went to another phone to call the police to ask if the call could be traced while the man was still on the phone. The police said no. But about 20 minutes later, when Douglas was leaving, a young policeman arrived in a van in front of the church, jumped out with an Alsatian and asked, 'Where is the bomb?'!! The banner was put up every morning and taken down every evening on a roster basis, but after a few weeks, when the roster ran out, it was just left up. It remained there for another week before someone tore it down and took it away during the night.

Meanwhile, in November, Debora Patta was arrested again, along with some other students, and kept in prison for 5 weeks. While she was in prison and being visited by Douglas Bax, who had to speak to her through a window, a female warder saw that Debora had brought a book into prison and took it away. In December Douglas reported to a Church Meeting that Debora had been admitted to Groote Schuur Hospital for depression, and that both her

mother and he had been refused permission to visit her. She was finally released a fortnight before Christmas. While she was in jail she turned 21, and our congregation sent her a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday card with a key attached and the words, 'We're sure you could make good use of this right now'!

Letters of support were also sent to Jan and Eunice van Eck and Brian and Di Bishop (all prominent political opponents of the Government) in 1985 after politically motivated attacks on their homes.

Meanwhile, from about 1983, services were held in our church every year on June 16 to commemorate Soweto Day, the day in 1976 on which young people in Soweto had risen up in protest against the enforced use of Afrikaans as the teaching medium for some subjects and many had been shot by the police. These services were organized by the Students' Union for Christian Action (SUCA) and a Democratic Teachers' Organisation working in white schools, and possibly also the Western Province Council of Churches. A number of school children attended, in their school uniforms.

In June 1986, during a state of emergency that the Government imposed, a Soweto Day service was held in our church at which Prof. Charles Villa-Vicencio of the Religious Studies Department at UCT preached. At the end of the service a small group of police entered the church, searched for banned literature and arrested one person. When those of us who attended came out through the front door, we found the church surrounded by several armed police and soldiers; an armoured vehicle known as a Caspir was even parked in front! A large notice had been pinned to the front door prohibiting meetings from being held in it, which Douglas immediately tore down, indignant both at the notice and the holes made in the door! The person who was arrested was a young woman, not a member of the congregation, who had attended the service. She was charged with possessing banned literature, held in prison for a few days and then released; the charge was later dropped.

Several other meetings of anti-apartheid organizations that were to be held in our church hall that year were banned.

Some members of the congregation signed the *Kairos Document* published in 1985 by the Institute of Contextual Theology and the subsequent *Road to Damascus* document when it came out.

Members of the congregation, especially some of the students, also took part in several banned demonstrations. Douglas Bax and Chuck Wanamaker, for instance, were part of the demonstration on the steps of St George's Cathedral at which the police charged the demonstrators and then actually charged after them into the cathedral. Douglas, Chuck, Bill Sewell and others also later took part in several peace marches, including the famous one in September 1989 during which the police sprayed marchers with purple dye from an armoured vehicle until one activist jumped on it and turned the spray away from the protesters onto the police! Douglas, Chuck, Kris Wanamaker, David Harrison and others were arrested and were in the Caledon

Square police station when some of the purple police walked in!

David Harrison also organized a declaration by sixth-year medical students at UCT that they would refuse to serve their internship in segregated hospitals. Under pressure many students then retracted, but David refused to do so.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the church was failing to grow. The number of active enrolled members remained around the 150 mark. The congregation was failing to attract enough new people and the main reason for this was what was seen as its controversial political stance and reputation. This was worrying, as the congregation needed more members and was struggling to meet its commitments.

In 1982 the church invited George Irvine, a Methodist minister in Port Elizabeth and nationally known preacher to conduct a mission in the congregation. This drew many people, and George's preaching was inspirational. A number of people experienced a breakthrough in committing themselves to Christ or recommitted themselves. The mission left a lasting impression on many people in the congregation, but did not add many to it. One symptom of the lower numbers (though also of the increasing secular employment of women) was the decision of the Women's Association finally to disband in 1984 because of dwindling support. The few remaining members banded together under the name 'Helping Hands'.

For the sake of spiritual renewal but also in the hope of increasing its numbers the church in 1984 invited Bruce Evans, formerly Anglican rector at Christ Church in Kenilworth and at that time Bishop of Port Elizabeth, to conduct a mission. The name chosen for the mission was 'A Time to Live'. It drew many people and inspired many, but again did not add noticeably to the church's numbers.

In 1988 the Baxes moved into a house in Harlequin Road, and the church, after basic structural repairs, sold the manse at 16 Weltevreden Avenue. A smaller house was bought at 16 Jamieson Avenue.

## THE 'UNITED' YEARS

An important constitutional change was first proposed by one of the church's longest standing members, Kay Gibson<sup>23</sup>, while she was a deacon. Kay had been a member of the Church of Scotland before she married and came to South Africa. The agreement that that all new Congregational and Presbyterian congregations should be constituted as united local churches had continued to be implemented in the Western Cape, although it had fallen away in other regions. Kay

<sup>22</sup> While David was a member of the church he and his sister Karen, his brother Steve and a friend went climbing in the Drakensberg and were caught in a very severe snowstorm. The church held a special vigil for them. David was spotted by the last spotter plane on its last flight to look for them, and they were rescued by helicopter. The dramatic story later appeared in the *Reader's Digest*. David was elected a deacon in 1991

<sup>23</sup> See her photo on page 32.

proposed that our congregation reconstitute itself as such a united Congregational-Presbyterian church. The Diaconate and then the Church Meeting supported the proposal, and the councils of the two denominations agreed. Finally at a special service on Sunday 30 July 1989 the new united constitution for the congregation was signed by the chairperson of the Regional Council, the moderator of the Presbytery and Douglas Bax as the minister. This reconstituted the church as 'The Rondebosch United Church (Congregational and Presbyterian)' within the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa as well as the UCCSA. The Diaconate became the Church Council and in terms of the new constitution took over some of the functions of the Church Meeting.

Douglas Bax then challenged the member churches of the Presbytery of Cape Town to follow the example of Rondebosch with a *quid pro quo*. This led the Stellenbosch Presbyterian Church to be reconstituted as a united church. Later the Paarl Auret Street and Worcester Congregational Churches (which both had Presbyterian ministers) also opted to become united churches. These churches together with the newly established united churches in the western Cape came to number , a considerable proportion of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in the region. As a result the Regional Council and the Presbytery, from December 1996 to October 1998, combined their bimonthly meetings, sharing as much of their agendas as possible before dividing into separate meetings. In 2000 the Presbyterian General Assembly urged the Presbytery and the Regional Council to explore the possibility of a full regional union between themselves.

In 1989 various repairs to the church and the hall were carried out.

That same year George Irvine was invited to lead a second mission in the church. This drew many people to the church again and inspired the congregation almost as much as George's first mission.

In 1989 the congregation also celebrated Douglas and Betty Bax's 10th anniversary with it at a special dinner in the hall. There were musical items and a hilarious skit by David Harrison taking the mickey out of the minister. The congregation presented Douglas with a red Cannondale tourer bicycle and Betty with a dishwasher. This event was largely initiated and organized by Nan Oosthuizen, who from 1981 to 1985 served the church as an exceptionally diligent office secretary.

In September 1989 Douglas Bax became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa. During his year of office he was away for several weeks representing the PCSA at 3 General Assemblies in Great Britain.

In 1991 Dawn Woods, Shaan Ellinghouse and Molly Small began a 'Friendship Club' to provide a monthly social meeting with entertainment for senior members of the congregation and others outside it. This continues to meet regularly.

In 1995 the Fraser family donated some money towards a memorial for Pat Fraser. About the same time it

was decided to make a babies' cry room of the northeast vestibule. Michael Wright soundproofed the room, and Douglas Jearey put in a loudspeaker system. It was eventually decided to use the donation to refurbish it to be a Memorial Room as well, in memory of Pat Fraser. The room and the plaque in memory of Pat Fraser were dedicated on 2 February 1997.

In 1995 a small congregation of the Chinese Evangelical Church, which until then had been meeting in one room in a flat, approached the minister in their quest for larger premises. It was eventually agreed in 1996 that they could use the church after our morning services. At first they paid only a nominal fee but later as their congregation grew the rent it paid contributed materially to our finances. In 2000 a white plastic face with large bold lettering in blue was fixed to the church's notice-board, and a little later the Chinese congregation placed an identically cut notice-board with Chinese lettering next to it to advertise their services.

In March 1995 George Malek became a probationer for the ministry in the UCCSA, and he and his wife Elmarie became members of the congregation. Originally a citizen of Egypt, he made contact with the Coptic Orthodox Church there and negotiated an invitation from it for a party of church people to visit Egypt. The result was that in February 1997 George and John de Gruchy led a party of people from different denominations, but including several members of our congregation, to Egypt. They enjoyed wonderful hospitality from the Coptic Church. For some days they stayed at a conference centre next to an ancient monastery in the desert, visiting other monasteries from there. Later they stayed at a conference centre in Cairo and visited a convent, churches and other sights. There were also bused to Alexandria, where they visited the Cathedral of St Mark.

In March 1997 George Malek was ordained as a self-supporting minister in the congregation. A bishop of the Coptic Church attended the service. At the end of that year Shenouda III, the Patriarch of the See of Alexandria and Pope of the Coptic Church, visited South Africa to oversee the ordination of some Coptic priests in the country. He and his party took time to accept an invitation to dinner in our church hall. This turned slightly awkward, when he announced at the dinner that he was on a fast, but he did eat some vegetables! At the end of the meal he graciously presented an icon of Jesus Christ as *Pantokratōr* to the church. John de Gruchy framed and fixed this to the west wall of the church, and it was dedicated on Sunday 18 January 1998.

Meanwhile in 1996 our congregation ran its first Alpha Course, a basic introduction to Christianity on video. Many members and several outsiders attended this. Courses followed in subsequent years in the home of the Church Council Secretary, Mrs Merry McClelland.

In 1997 the church's property in Jamieson Road,

which had never been used as a manse, was sold and the sale price invested.

In June 1995 two theological students, Robert Steiner from Germany and Juan Garcés from Spain, wandered into an evening service. Twelve months later Robert and his wife Tina enrolled as members. Both became involved in the Sunday School, which at that time was low in numbers but with their help began to revive. Robert also began helping with the evening services by playing the piano. He then decided to candidate for the ministry in the PCSA and at the beginning of 1997 became a probationer and Youth Minister. Two years later, in February 1999, he was ordained and in April formally appointed part-time Assistant Minister. Meanwhile he started and coached a soccer team in the congregation which drew many youngsters, some of whom came into the Sunday School and the Youth Club he restarted with the help of Peter Anders. This brought in more families, which made the congregation more multiracial.



Merry McClelland  
Church Council Secretary.

In 1999 a visiting American professor, William Everett, conducted a service geared also to children and young people. Following his example Robert continued to conduct such 'Family Services' on the last Sunday of every month with great imagination and creativity. At the beginning of 2000 he recruited church members to establish an After-School Homework Programme for young people whose first language was not English. Meanwhile he tried to make contact with students on the UCT campus and started a students' house church, which later became a young adults' house church. He revived contact with the then Reformed Presbyterian Church in Guguletu and facilitated two combined worship services. At one of those services the Guguletu marimba band played. This inspired him and our choir mistress, Sybil Lessing, to organize a set of marimbas for our church, which Sybil very generously donated.

A dinner celebrating over twenty years of service was held for Douglas and Betty Bax on 26 November 1999. The congregation generously presented them with money to re-upholster their lounge suite, which was much used for gatherings in their home! This event was largely initiated and organized by Merry McClelland, the Church Council Secretary.

In September 1999 the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa united to form the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA).

Plans to celebrate the centenary of the church began in 1999. A Centenary Thanksgiving Fund was started to raise money to subsidise the celebrations. Previous anniversaries of the church had been in December, to celebrate the month when its first meeting was held in the Town Hall in 1900. However, the church decided to celebrate its centenary as the centenary of 1901, the year in

which it was formally constituted, so as to include a number of events spanning the year.

Sunday 4 February 2001 was the day set for UCCSA congregations to renew the covenant. Our congregation held a special service that day to inaugurate the centenary year. Ivan Brown, the chairman of the Regional Council, Zolile Rashe, the Moderator of Presbytery, Bill Webster, the minister at Mowbray, Ernst van der Walt, the dominee of the Rondebosch Dutch Reformed Church, and lay delegates from several surrounding local churches attended, including St Paul's Anglican Church. Several other local churches sent letters with good wishes. A centenary banner made by Isobel de Gruchy and new candlesticks designed by Julian Cooke and made by John de Gruchy were dedicated. A special tea followed. During the service the covenant shown in the frame on this page was specially written for the occasion and was recited by the congregation.

In March a special centenary 'Church Family' weekend was held at 'Volmoed', a Christian guest farm near Hermanus. Over 50 people, including children, attended. The weekend, led by Rod Botsis, the minister at Bellville Presbyterian Church, was a great success. On 9 May a special centenary dinner was held. That was followed over the next four days by a centenary mission with the title 'Beginning at the End'. It was led by Trevor Hudson, a well-known Methodist preacher, speaker and writer.

race groups. Interest in this wider fellowship remained active, and our representatives regularly attended its quarterly area meetings. Much later, in 1943, Rondebosch was chosen as the venue for the 21st birthday celebrations of the Federation.

The WA worked hard for many years to help pay off the loan taken out to buy the manse in Glebe Terrace in 1921. To celebrate the final payment Mrs Johnson, on behalf of the WA, in August 1926 handed formally over the deeds of the manse to the minister, Mr J.A. Atkinson.

The early WA was much concerned with the abuse of liquor and supported the 'temperance' movement. In 1928 it distributed several hundred temperance leaflets. Members attended the licensing court in Wynberg and met to pray that a liquor licence would not be granted in the Athlone area.

In 1929 women from the WA designed and reconstructed the church garden. For a long time the WA employed, paid and supervised the gardener.

Another important concern was missionary work. An early record mentions materials for making pillow-lace sent to Serowe in Botswana! Until the mid-1930s the WA took a special interest in supporting the Clarence Road Mission in Wynberg. It also for many years took a practical interest in the Harrington Street Congregational Church, which was started in 1937, and gave regular assistance to the Congregational church at Nyanga.

In 1936 various women's organisations organised a large rally in support of the Peace Movement. Members of our WA supported this. The rally adopted and sent several resolutions to the Cape Town branch of the League of Nations. When the Second World War broke out the WA joined many other societies in sending financial donations and gifts to the Bombed Cities' Fund, the Red Cross, General Smuts's Birthday Fund, the Prisoners' Fund, the Mercantile Marines Navy Week and 'Ouma' Smuts's Birthday Fund. Fund-raising events for these causes included a 'cafe chantant', a 'measuring party' and 'clock golf teas'.

At the end of the war the WA affiliated with the National Council of Women, and NCW activities were thereafter fully reported at its meetings.

For the church's jubilee celebrations in December 1950, the WA arranged a special jubilee bazaar. The stall helpers all wore white dresses with gold aprons, and the hall and church were decorated with flowers in various

We believe in the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: we believe in God the Father, Origin and Creator of all; we confess Jesus Christ the Son, as Lord and Saviour; we depend on the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

We give thanks for the men and women who a century ago first covenanted together to form this congregation, for all who have given generously to maintain its ministry and to erect and maintain these buildings, for all who have been leaders or teachers and all who have served and worshipped in this congregation.

Above all, we give thanks for the continuing presence of Christ with us, in Word and sacrament, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and for every gift, grace and blessing we have received.

In the unity of our faith and worship, remembering those who have gone before us, preparing the way for those who will come after us and facing up to the tasks to which God calls us today, we solemnly renew our covenant to worship, work and witness together as God's people in fellowship with one another.

We shall seek to live according to all that God made known to our forbears, makes known to us today and will make known to us in the future.

We shall seek to witness to the glory and grace of God and God's coming reign of justice and peace, that we may be used to build up the body of Christ and bring hope and salvation to people in the world.

To God alone be the glory. Amen.

During the service the congregation recited the above covenant, specially written for the occasion.

## THE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

As in every church women have played an extremely important role in ours. This began with two requests at the outset. The first, in October 1901, was for the women in the church to arrange a social to welcome delegates of the Congregational Union to a meeting in the Rondebosch Town Hall. The second was a request to assist the church financially. In 1902 the women of the congregation formed themselves into a committee to canvas for funds for the church building and arranged a Great Fair in the Town Hall. The committee developed into the Woman Association, which in 1903 formulated as its motto: 'By love serve one another.'

On 9 May 1922 representatives from all Congregational Women's Groups in the Peninsula met and formed the Federation of the Western Province Congregational Women's Associations. This included all

shades of gold. All girls in the Sunday School wore gold ribbons. The WA also arranged the catering for the other celebrations connected with the jubilee.

In 1963 the Women's Association took over from the Sea Point Congregational Church the annual collection and despatch of parcels of clothing and money to evangelists and retired ministers.

In 1966 the WA reduced its weekly meetings to twice a month at 10 a.m.

## The Girl's Auxiliary

The Girl's Auxiliary was started in 1925 with 14 members meeting twice a month in the evenings. The first President was the minister's wife, Mrs Atkinson. At first, to the regret of the organizers, the only members were girls from the Railway Hostel. They made garments for the Peninsula Hospital.

By 1928 the members were down to 5, including Mrs Gow, the President, but they kept the Auxiliary going. In the years prior to World War II, until the blackout made travel unsafe, two members went monthly on a roster basis to Clarence Road, Wynberg, to help a girls' auxiliary start there and to help with devotions and sewing. During the 1940s the Auxiliary was a lively group supporting the work of the Women's Association. It met on Monday evenings once a month in members' homes, with occasional Saturday afternoon meetings. For years Mrs Arthur Johnson led it until Mrs Jess Tarrant took this over in 1946. In 1959 Jess was made Life President.

In 1955 the Girls' Auxiliary renamed itself the Women's Evening Group. Its meetings normally consisted of devotions and talks by visiting speakers, but it also helped cater for church functions and raised funds for the church and outside causes like the Janet Bournehill Institute, the Dombodema Maternity Hospital in Rhodesia and the Ruby Adendorff Home.

## Amalgamation

In 1969 the Evening Group became fully part of the Women's Association and was renamed the Rondebosch Congregational Church Women's Association Evening Group. Like the WA it became affiliated to the National Council of Women. In 1970 the Group undertook the support of an African scholar each year through the Bantu Scholar's Education Fund. It continued with its fund-raising for the church and outside causes and with catering for church functions. Mrs Barbara Grieve, a member of the Group, attended a conference in Paris of the Interim Executive of the International Council of Women, at which the French President's wife hosted a dinner for the delegates at the Elysees Palace.

The WA as a whole participated in a programme celebrating the 'Year of the Bible' in 1971. The following year the church launched a building fund, and the WA helped with a cake and jumble sale, a crossword competition, a bridge drive and a display of the Marjorie Schuster Doll Collection.

The WA arranged the catering for the UCCSA Assembly in Rondebosch in 1975. The following year it ran a bazaar to offset the building debt.

In 1977 the Morning Group ceased meeting separately and formally amalgamated with the Evening Group, which now took the name of the Women's Association.

In 1978 the WA took over the editing of *Voice* from the minister. On 17 December it held a farewell tea-party for Geoffrey Dunstan and his family. Its members also stocked the pantry for the new minister, Douglas Bax, and his wife Betty, and served a special tea at Douglas's induction on 1 January.

In 1981 the WA organized and led the Women's Day Service. In 1982 it worked for the mission conducted by George Irvine.

By 1983 many members had moved away or retired, and the WA was struggling to keep going. In February 1984 it disbanded as a formal group. In order to maintain contact and fellowship, however, the few women left formed a small informal group called the Helping Hands. Sadly, after a few years this group finally petered out.

## YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH: SUNDAY SCHOOL AND CHARISMA

Shortly after the Rondebosch Congregational Church was formally constituted in 1901, a Sunday School was started in the afternoon with 13 members. In 1902 the Sunday School was taken on its picnic at St James. This remained an annual event for many years, until a drop in support in the early 1970s led to its discontinuation for a time.

In 1912 the Sunday School was for some reason temporarily closed. It re-opened in September, for 'children of the members of the congregation and other europeans', according to the Annual Report to the congregation!!

On 9 November 1917 a 'Rondebosch Christian Endeavour Society' was started for young people of 11 years of age and over, with 16 members.

Toward the end of 1920 the Management Committee, having observed the growth of the 'Children's Church' Movement in the Peninsula, especially in Mowbray Presbyterian Church under the leadership of William Haygood, asked Mr Haygood to establish a similar service for the children of our church and community. The first such service was held in the church hall on the morning of Sunday 7 November 1920. Sunday School itself continued in the afternoon until the 1940s, when it was moved to the same time as the morning church service. The children then joined in the first part of the service and left during the offering, which was taken up early, to continue their classes in the hall.

Many faithful teachers served in the Sunday School during that era. Among the most noteworthy were Mr. J.A. Giffen, who served as Superintendent for many years, and Mr. J.Z. Drake and Mr. B.H. Impey, who followed

him. Mrs Heather Adams served as a teacher and later as Secretary for many years. Mrs Effie Phillipson, Mrs Doreen Reed and Miss Bessie Price, who served as leader of the Primary Department for more than 30 years, were other stalwarts. Their work and the growth of the congregation as a whole brought the Sunday School to a peak in 1955, with 169 children! A photograph of a Sunday School Anniversary and Prize Giving from then or a little later shows the hall packed with children and their parents. The Anniversary and Prize Giving remained an annual congregational event until about 1967.

In 1968 the name of the Sunday School was changed to 'the Junior Church', and it was divided into three departments: Primary, Intermediate and Bible Class. The Junior Church attended part of the morning worship of the church, for a time at the end of the service, but from the beginning of 1975 at the beginning of the service. But over this time numbers in the Sunday School declined.

In 1975, with Roger Haupt as Superintendent and Myrtle Barnes and Isobel de Gruchy as respective leaders of the Primary Department and Bible Class, the numbers built up again to about 100 children on the roll and twelve teachers. This was also the time when Iona McLeod's Junior Choir flourished.

Meanwhile Isobel de Gruchy, who had been giving Sunday School teachers leadership training, took over as Superintendent from 1978. The next year many parents reported that their children were enjoying Sunday School. Isobel remained Superintendent until the end of 1982. In 1979 the Sunday School began to support the 'Target Timothy' programme, which collected money for Sunday Schools in the black townships. Later that year the Junior Church staged a 'Year of the Child' display after the church service, and it was resolved to send a monthly donation to World Vision to sponsor a child.

During 1980 there was further growth. A Special Service was held on 24th August to celebrate the 200th year of the founding of Sunday Schools.

The annual picnic at St James had been reinstated. But in 1982 it was cancelled, when the authorities refused to allow black children on the beach. In 1983 Isobel de Gruchy went to the USA, and Pam Wanamaker became Superintendent. She was succeeded by Alison McQueen, Heather Carter, Vanessa Smith, Nikki Woods, and Esther de Gruchy.

27 August 1989 was National Sunday School Day, and our Sunday School joined other local Sunday Schools with its own banner to march along Main Road. This ended with cold drinks and biscuits at the Rosebank Methodist Church.

Meanwhile, stepping back nearly a decade and a half, in the late 1970s the older children in Sunday School (Std.6-8) had taken over the name 'Junior Church'. It was this group, by then consisting of scholars in Std 6-10, that Jim Cochrane was appointed to lead and revive in 1976. Under his leadership the 'Rondebosch Congregational Youth Group' began to include young people of other races. At the end of 1977 Di Scott-Saddington took over from Jim, and a new name was chosen for the group:

Charisma. This met in the minor hall and the gallery at the same time as the morning service. Di was also very active in the national youth work in the UCCSA and she produced an excellent confirmation guide, *Youth Ministry in a Time of Crisis*, for which Desmond Tutu wrote the foreword. Apart from the theoretical introduction most of the lessons in it were confirmation lessons she and Douglas Bax had drafted. She was succeeded by two more excellent leaders, Steve de Gruchy and then David Harrison, a medical student, who was assisted by Craig Morrison. They were followed by Ross Wanless (a part-time paid Youth Worker) and Justine Georgeu for 1990-1991. When Ross left, Justine and Don and Suellen Shay and later Anton and Esther de Gruchy continued the work. Anton and Chris van den Heever also helped Michael Bax run a well-attended Friday evening Youth Group in 1993-94. Karen Botha led Charisma in 1994. After she left, however, Charisma, which had once been such a flourishing and important group in the church, petered out.

At the same time the Sunday School had been falling on lean times. By 1994 numbers had declined so much that for a period it in effect also petered out. This was distressing, and Estelle Hester, a church member who was also a deacon, felt a particular call to do something about it. On Christmas Day 1994 she made a concerted effort to resuscitate the Sunday School with a children's story in church. This became a regular feature of the church service again, with several people assisting with stories, and other members came forward to help with the care of the children in the hall and also with a crèche for toddlers. With Estelle's effective and then actual departure from the congregation a few years later, however, the Sunday School again began to decline in spite of efforts by Janine Kirby and Don and Suellen Shay to keep it going.

Then in 1999 Robert Steiner took over the running of the Sunday School. Under his leadership teachers were recruited and the children were organized into 3 groups: the Sparklers (aged 3-4), the All Stars (5-7) and the Trailblazers (8-10). The Scripture Union SALT programme was introduced to give structure and substance to the teaching. Robert, a keen soccer player, started a team practice every Friday evening which he coached. With the increasing integration of the southern suburbs this drew more and more boys, many of whom then formed an older class in the Sunday School. This in effect began to replace the group that had once called itself 'Charisma'.

In 2000 the church's choir mistress, Sybil Lessing, generously donated a set of marimbas to the church and paid for a course of lessons for young people to learn to play them. Once they were proficient, marimba music became a regular part of the morning church services – in response to which the congregation often applauded. The Sunday School (including the older boys) at present has a total list of about 35 children and is growing.

## **THE DRAMATIC SOCIETY**



One of the most successful societies in the history of the congregation was the Rondebosch Congregational Dramatic Society. It was founded in 1956, with Bill Robertson and Harry Wright as its leading lights. It arranged readings of plays from the Bloemfontein Drama Library once a month and from its inception endeavoured to stage at least two productions a year. This not only provided entertainment and pleasure for members of the congregation and friends, but contributed to church funds. Standards were high, and the plays engendered outstanding team work, costumes and goodwill. The society was particularly indebted to following people: Kay and George Adley, Herbert and Phyllis Greenwood, Louie Isaac, Marjory Jones, Arthur Fraser, David le Roux, Jo Dunstan, Megan and Stephan Wellman, Arthur Green, Nancy McIntyre, and Winifred and Harry Wright.

Between 1958 and 1976 34 plays were produced, 3 of which were particularly notable in that they won the Fish Hoek Play Festival Trophy. They were: 'The Permanent Way' (1963), 'Madame De' (1968) and 'Transcending' (1969). The society finally petered out and closed down in 1979.

## THE STORY OF OUR ORGAN

RICHARD MOTH

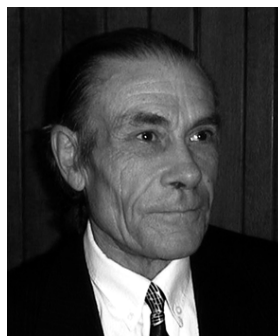
*Richard started his musical education as a choirboy of 11 in York Minster. He taught to play the organ by the York Minster organist, Dr Francis Jackson. He eventually apprenticed himself to an organ building firm in Durham, Harrison & Harrison. After further lessons in playing the organ in London with Dr Conrad Eden he came to South Africa in 1970 to work for Cooper, Gill and Tomkins. In 1995 he set up his own firm, Durbanville Pipe Organ Builders. He has been our organist since 1994.*

The first musical instrument used in our congregation was a harmonium. It cost £30 and was used in the very first Congregational service in Rondebosch held in the Rondebosch Town Hall on Sunday 9 December 1900. It remained with the church, being later used in the Mary Giffen Hall, until it was disposed of in the late 1970s.

By the end of 1916 the church had had enough. In January 1917 the hydraulic engine was disconnected, and a human organ blower was appointed to pump the organ by hand. Towards the middle of 1903 thought must have been given to obtaining a pipe organ, for in September Mr W C Cooper (later of the firm Cooper, Gill and Tomkins or CG&T) wrote to the church, stating that, if Mowbray Presbyterian and Rondebosch agreed to give him the order for new organs, he would assemble each for the sum of £43.10s. The order was placed with Mr Cooper on 19 October and, through the agents Messrs Findlay, Durham and Brodie, he duly obtained both organs from the Norwich firm of Norman and Beard. This was unusual, as this company had until then supplied only one organ to

South Africa, that in the Feathermarket Hall in Port Elizabeth, as far back as 1892. It was unusual at that time to order new organs from anywhere except the Sheffield builders, Brindley and Foster. Rondebosch's organ cost £650.

Mowbray's organ arrived first and was put together in time for Christmas 1903. Work on the organ for Rondebosch started on 29 February 1904. The organ was positioned 'temporarily' against the south wall of the church, which was due to be rebuilt. Both wall and organ were to occupy their temporary positions for the next 71 years. The work finished by the middle of April. Mr Cooper himself gave the opening recital on Thursday 21 April. A more formal 'opening' of the organ followed on Thursday evening, 5 May 1904 with an organ recital by Mr Harry Evans. A meeting on 4 August 1904 appointed a Mr Layton organist. 'As the Church could not afford to pay an Organist's salary', he was asked to accept his fare from Cape Town to Rondebosch in recompense!



Richard Moth,  
Organist and Organ Builder

Two forms of blowing the organ were provided. A hand pump was installed for emergency use, but the main supply came from a hydraulic engine placed in the vestry. This was a source of constant trouble from the start, refusing to work if the water pressure was low as a result of drought and using excessive water when the leather packing around the piston wore out. The organ had been in use only for 4 months when repairs became necessary through damp, a problem that persisted for the next 14 years.

By the end of 1916 the church had had enough. In January 1917 the hydraulic engine was disconnected, and a human organ blower was appointed to pump the organ by hand. In March 1918 a caretaker and organ-blower was appointed at a salary of £3 per month.

By March 1918 it was agreed that the organ should receive its first overhaul, as many defects had been 'brought about by dust, grit, knobs of plaster and a multitude of pine needles'. Shrinkage in the timber was also causing excessive wind leakage, making the job of the poor pumper even more arduous.

The following year, the generosity of Miss Celia Thorne, one of the foundation members of the church, enabled it to order an electric organ blower for £123. Cooper, Gill and Tomkins obtained this from the Spencer Turbine Co in the USA and installed it in January 1921.

The original organ, which the congregation at the time no doubt found adequate, was nevertheless a pathetic instrument to perform on. It was originally supplied with three keyboards, anticipating the time when the church would be enlarged, but owing to financial constraints no

pipes and mechanism were included for the third keyboard and its stops and indeed many of the other stops, which left little else to play with.

At the end of 1927, Mr Cooper had returned to England to become manager of a famous organ-building firm, Rushworth and Dreaper of Liverpool. This was to lead to a strange quirk of fate. In 1928 the church received a legacy from the estate of Miss Celia Thorne to install some of the missing pipes. Four new stops, Dolce, Cornopean, Wald Flute and Corno di Bassetto, were ordered from Rushworths. Thus even from 6,000 miles away Cooper still had a hand in the organ he had assembled 24 years before. This magnificent legacy more than covered the £195 that these pipes cost. A dedication service and an opening recital were held on Sunday 6 March 1929, and brass plate was affixed to the organ.

In 1934 CG&T recommended another overhaul and cleaning and the replacement of all leather on the internal mechanisms. This was eventually tackled in February 1937 at a cost of £158.10s. A Trinity College examiner who happened to be in South Africa at the time, Dr Edgar Ford FRCO, was asked to give the re-opening recital. This took place on Friday 19 March together with performances by the church choir. Admission was by programme at a cost of 1/6d. The event was described as a 'rare treat for musicians and organists', but afterwards Dr Ford complained to the organist, Dr Paul Oates, about 'the poor attendance by church members'. Dr Oates remarked that it made him 'reticent to organise a similar evening'. The public's reluctance to attend organ recitals is evidently no recent phenomenon! Nevertheless the evening raised a total of £11.

In September 1948 the church's longest serving organist joined the church, Mr (later Prof.) Herbert Greenwood. By September 1949 he had become a deacon, and in December 1950 he took up service at the organ. He was to hold this position with only one break until November 1971!

A further straightforward cleaning of the organ took place at the beginning of 1951 at a cost of £138.10s. But by 1954 further problems were being experienced, not only with worn parts in the organ but also with the motor. A decision was deferred several times, but by the middle of 1956 the situation was critical. On Prof Greenwood's recommendation it was decided to rebuild the organ with electric action, a new detached console, two new electric motors and installation of the missing third keyboard. It was decided to engage Messrs R Muller and a contract was signed on 31 October 1956, in retrospect an unfortunate decision because of the poor quality of this firm's work. As there was no room in the main part of the organ for the

addition of the pipes for the third keyboard, a concrete platform was erected, jutting out from the north wall of the church above the pews beneath it, and the extra pipes and mechanism were positioned on this platform. It was a peculiar arrangement, as the organist, positioned between the two parts of the organ, now heard the sound of the instrument coming from two different directions at once. Work went on through most of the first half of 1957, and a dedication service and a recital were held to mark the completion of work on Tuesday 28 May 1957. Including the electrician's charges, this work cost £2784.

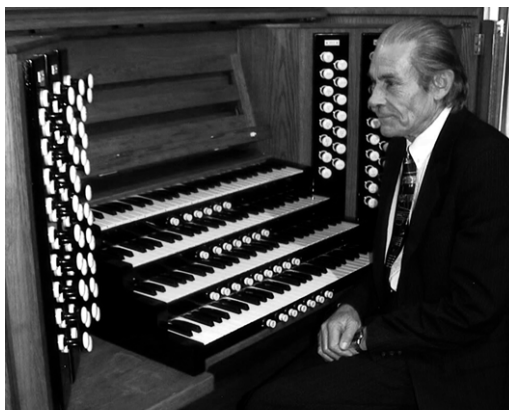
It was not long, however, before serious new troubles began. First the concrete platform began to sag noticeably. Several attempts were made to stabilize it, until it settled in the middle of 1960. Then major defects became apparent in the new detached console, mainly bare wires that in touching each other caused short circuits with peculiar effects. Moreover these so-called organ-builders had damaged the Cornopean stop installed in 1928. As a result it still refuses to stay in tune for more than a couple of weeks, whereas the Corno di Bassetto dating from the same time stays in tune like a rock.

At the end of 1967 the maintenance of the organ once again reverted to CG&T. It was not long before they began to urge another overhaul to remedy the instrument's recurring wiring problems. Only one item was finally agreed to, and carried out by me in April 1970, in my first association with the church, as an employee of that firm.

In May 1970 the first proposals for rebuilding the southern end of the church were tabled. This culminated on 10 March 1975 with the dismantling of both sections of the organ and the removal of the console. The splendid chamber where the organ now resides was constructed, and during the latter half of 1975 both sections of the organ were installed in the new chamber. This amounted to a complete rebuilding of the old Norman and Beard organ, repositioning the 1957 additions, and adding a new mixture stop and new electric cables throughout. It was a massive job that cost R8,126.40.

A few years later, at the start of 1979, the maintenance of the instrument was handed to a local organ-builder, Mr Frank Clift. In 1993 the mechanism of the third keyboard (the work of R Muller again!) suffered a massive split. As a result in August 1993 maintenance once again went back to CG&T. The repairs cost R4,600. The church will ever be indebted to Merry McClelland, who contributed well over half of this.

I took over as organist in July 1994. At the end of that year yet another massive split appeared in the same component. As a professional organ-builder I was able to repair this at a nominal charge, since when it has given no



Richard Moth at the new organ console he is constructing for the church. Note the four manuals, as well as the extended range of organ stops and couplers on both sides.

more trouble.

I soon became aware of the one major omission in the tonal resources of the organ: there was no Trumpet stop. It was a cause of embarrassment to me when bridal couples requested the 'Trumpet Voluntary' for their weddings. So I obtained a complete set of second-hand Trumpet pipes from Johannesburg in October 1994 and fitted these into the organ at the beginning of 1997, for the cost of the pipes only, namely R10,000. At the same time a new stop was added to the top keyboard, a 'Fifteenth', which gave it some brightness and sparkle.

What of the future? Under the hall stage is a complete two-manual organ that I have donated to the church for additions to its organ. These are slowly being made, as and when I have time. Meanwhile the 1957 console built by R Muller has reached the end of its life, being almost totally worn out. I have been constructing a brand new console in my workshop that will not only be adequate for the existing organ but make provision for all the additions yet to come. The new console is now about one third complete. With imported parts, locally obtained timber and my labour, this item alone is to be valued at over a quarter of a million Rand, such is the pace of escalating prices....

All praise and admiration must go to the people of long ago, who decided to purchase an organ from a relatively unknown supplier. Though 97 years old, it is now in excellent condition with first class materials and workmanship and, we can be confident, will continue giving good service well into its second century. Indeed we now have one of the finest organs in the Cape Town suburbs, and with its future additions it will become the seventh largest organ in Cape Town with a total of 2,525 pipes – a far cry from its comparatively miserable beginnings nearly a century ago!

## Postscript

Many people have delighted in the playing of our present organist, Richard Moth, and in the magnificent instrument he has made of our organ. We are extremely fortunate to have him not only as our organist but as our organ-builder. He has donated not only a complete organ to be added to our original instrument but an immense amount of his own time, quite free, to rebuilding and expanding it. Besides this, in an act of extraordinary generosity, he has paid R100 000 out of his own pocket for the parts, mainly from overseas, that were needed for the new console he is building for it! I have visited his workshop in Durbanville to look at this and been very impressed with the care and quality of his workmanship. He is building the whole console in modules and connecting its wires with computer plugs, to facilitate its transport to the church and ease of assembly and disassembly.

The final product (organ plus console) will, Richard tells us, will have a value of R7 000 000 in terms of what it would cost in parts and labour to replace (even though any sale could expect only a fraction of that). With 2 525 pipes it will be the 7<sup>th</sup> largest organ in Greater Cape Town, greater than that in St Mary's Catholic Cathedral (2466), for instance. Only the organs in the Groote Kerk (5 089 pipes), the Baxter Concert Hall (3 716), the City Hall (3 285), St George's Cathedral (3 018), the University of the Western Cape Great Hall (2 906) and the Silvertown New Apostolic Church (2 818) will exceed it. None of these will exceed it in excellence of construction, reliability or sound, however! It will indeed be a monument to the expertise, generosity and industry of Richard John Moth! As such, may it long be used to the glory of God! DSB

## THE MARIMBA BAND

### SYBIL LESSING

*Sybil Lessing is a retired opera singer. She has sung, amongst others, with PACT and with the operatic chorus in the Stadttheater Klagenfurt. She met her husband, Barry Lessing, when they sang together in the University Choir of Stellenbosch. She is currently the Choir Mistress.*

Sometimes a simple question brings one up quite short. The other day an American visitor said to me: 'I love the marimbas, but why are there only boys in the band?' Once I had thought about it, the answer was obvious – the Marimba Band has grown out of Robert's soccer club. We did have some girls at the first try-outs at Easter last year but they found it heavy going.

Marimba playing actually demands enormous energy and very strong wrists. This our present team of Mpho, Gavin, Manasseh and Siviwe have in abundance and I am very proud of them. But I still dream of a second female team, perhaps on my Grahamstown-built sneeze wood marimbas which are smaller and more finicky, but have a marvellous sound.



Sybil Lessing,  
Choir Mistress

In the mean time, although we still have a lot of polishing to do, I think the band is really enriching our worship.

My mother, whose legacy went to buy the marimbas, was a ballet dancer and somewhere, I am sure, she is dancing in time to the beat.

# Titbits



Daddy Longlegs: Douglas Jeary connecting the electricity to light up the Centenary Banner hung up above the front doors of the church.



The Marimba Band. From the left: Sybil Lessing (Choir Mistress), Gavin Pেকেur, Manasseh Selokoma, Mpho Selokoma and Siviwe Mqikela

3

Meeting to organize for Church Services Dec 6<sup>th</sup> 1900  
 On Thursday Decr 6<sup>th</sup> 1900 following  
 gentlemen viz - W<sup>m</sup> Thorne Esq, H. Willeman Esq, Hon  
 C. W. Hutton M.B.A. W. Thomson Esq, Hugh Beattie Esq  
 W. F. Wood and Polhemus Lyon met with Rev W. Forbes at office  
 of W<sup>m</sup> Thorne Esq to organize as a committee for the  
 conduct of Congregational Church Services at the  
 Rondebosch Town Hall during months of December  
 1900 - January & February 1901

Of this self constituted temporary Com<sup>tee</sup>  
 Mr Thorne was appointed Chairman, Mr Beattie  
 Treasurer and Mr Lyon Secretary.

Mpho Beattie and Lyon having had the  
 preliminary work in hand reported that the Rondebosch  
 Town Council had granted the use of Town Hall for  
 religious services on Sunday Mornings & Evening  
 for three months from December 9<sup>th</sup> (as accepted by us)  
 including Contactor and Electric light for £2.2.0  
 per month

That hand bills were to be distributed following day  
 to the number of 2000 through the adjacent neighborhoods  
 as well as some 50 large posters  
 That adnotato had been prepared for the Papers as  
 well as press notices

4

That an organ had been obtained from Messrs Maxwell  
 and Esq for £30- which is retainable at a cost of £7.10  
 at expiry of the three months - That a box for Com-  
 munications to the Pastor had been prepared for  
 placing at the door. that table-spacing desk had been  
 It was resolved to begin services on Decr 9<sup>th</sup> and  
 to take up collections at each service toward expenses  
 Upon inquiry Rev Mr Forbes stated that the Colonial  
 Missionary Society allowed him a salary of £25.0.0  
 a month at present, and he would be satisfied for the  
 time being if we could relieve them of some of this -  
 It was resolved to pay this so far as our receipts  
 would permit - Meeting adjourned to call of Secy  
 Mr. B. It is to be noted that Prof Thomson at the  
 last moment sent regret for absence but gladly consented  
 to join the Com<sup>tee</sup>

W<sup>m</sup> Thorne  
 Chairman

The first minutes of a committee that met to begin Congregational church services in Rondebosch in December 1900. The minutes are dated Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December 1900.

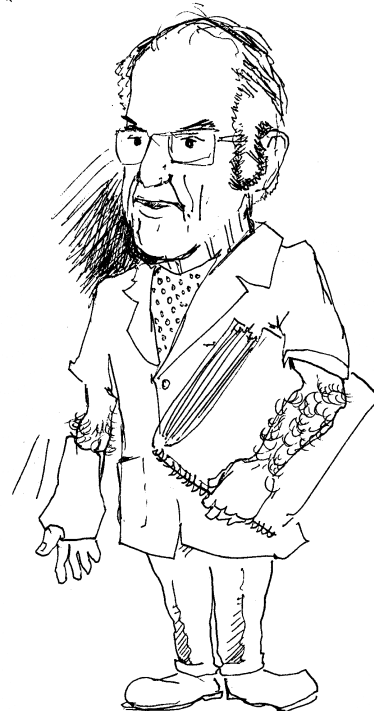


Richard Moth tuning the F# pipe in the open diapason register behind the main organ pipes in the organ loft.



Members of the choir relax before the worship service. From the left: Maureen Arney, Shaan Ellinghouse, Joan Langton, Sybil Lessing (Choir Mistress) and Goodness Zuma

BAX WAXING!



Cartoon drawn by Robin Jacobson during the General Assembly of 1996. Douglas had injured his wrist cycling.

1927 Nov 17 <sup>th</sup> No. 195	Jocelyn Francois Smuts	August 8 <sup>th</sup> 1927	Reuben John Evilign am D	Du Toit	Rivclands	Company Director.	Gwendoline Hagerwood & Sons The Rt. Hon. General J.C. Smuts Col. Thackeray.	W.A. Richards.
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An extract from the Baptismal Register showing the Rt. Hon. General J.C. Smuts as godfather to Jocelyn Francois Smuts at her baptism on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1927

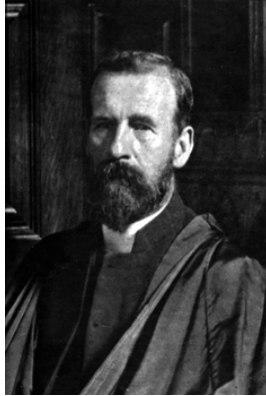
# ORGANISTS AND CHOIR DIRECTORS WHO HAVE SERVED OUR CHURCH

	<b>Organists</b>	<b>Choirmasters/mistresses</b>
1900-	Mr Edwin J. Wood	
1904-1904	Mr Layton	Mr Layton (1904-1904)
1904-1907	Mr H Evans	
1907-1909	Miss Elsie Richards	Mr W.J. Hutchins (1907- )
1909-1910	Mr Jelks	
1910-1912	Prof. H Hilton (Prof. of Singing, Stellenbosch Conservatorium)	
1912-1916	Mr Dan Price	
1916-1919	Mr F. Stopford Sackville	
1919-1921	Mr Croft	
1921 (May-Oct.)	Mr Wyllie Turnbull	
1921-1923	Mr R M Blackwood	
1923-1924	Mr W A Montanus	
1924-1927	Mr W M Stephen	
1928-1932	Mr Howard Layton	
1932-1935	Mr Robert Burns	
1936-1938	Dr Paul Oates	
1939-1939	Mr Aubrey Human	
1939-1944	Mr Philip Britton	
1944-1946	Mr Clifton Welsh	
1946-1950	Mr John H Stevens	
1950-1968	Mr Herbert Greenwood	Mr Herbert Greenwood
1969 (Feb.-Dec.)	Mr J Trevor Cole	
1970-1971	Prof. Herbert Greenwood	Prof. Herbert Greenwood
1971-1972	Mr Louis Jenneker	
1972-1973	Mr Peter van Rensburg	
1973-1975	Mr Louis Jenneker	
1975-1979	Miss Elizabeth Sole	
1979-1982	Mr Alan Lusty	
1982-1983	Mr Peter Black	Mr Peter Black
1983-1987	Mr David Cherry	Mr David Cherry
1987-1990	Miss Myra Horn	Miss Myra Horn
1990-1991	Miss Catherine Foxcroft	
1991 (Apr.-Oct.)	Mr Jeffrey Gordon Wiseman	
1991-1993	Mr Louis Jenneker	
1993-1994	Mr Anthony Lomberg	
1994-	Mr Richard J Moth	Mrs Roselle Frasca (1994-1996) Mrs Sybil Lessing (1996- )

## OUR MINISTERS PAST AND PRESENT

### WILLIAM FORBES 1900-1911

William Forbes came from England and served as minister of the Caledon Square Church in Cape Town for ten years. He resigned in 1898 because of ill-health and returned to England. There he recovered and came back to South Africa and worked for the Colonial Missionary Society, until he was called to be minister of the proposed new congregation at Rondebosch in 1900. It was under his leadership that the work was begun and consolidated, and a place for worship was built in Belmont Road. He served the church as its minister until his death in September, 1911.



William Forbes

### J. MARTIN DOWER 1911-1912

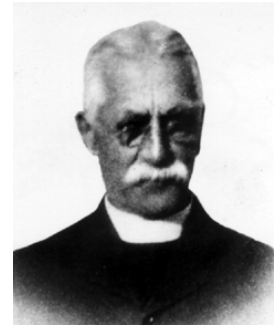
J. Martin Dower's ministry in Rondebosch lasted only a matter of months, as unfortunately ill-health made him resign. But in spite of the shortness of his ministry it was remembered for the particular interest he took in young people and their training in the Christian faith. Fortunately for the denomination, he later recovered to become the General Secretary of the Congregational Union in 1933.<sup>24</sup>



J. Martin Dower

### J. GOULD-LAYTON 1913-1914

J. Gould-Layton ministered for many years at Bedford in the Eastern Cape. He had already retired from the active ministry by the time Mr Dower resigned, but took over the ministry at Rondebosch for a year on an interim basis.



J. Gould-Layton

### MEARNS MASSIE 1915-1917

An American by birth, Mearns Massie came to South Africa and held this pastorate for three years. He then went on to Australia, where he died. His ministry is remembered for his gifts as a preacher.



Mearns Massie

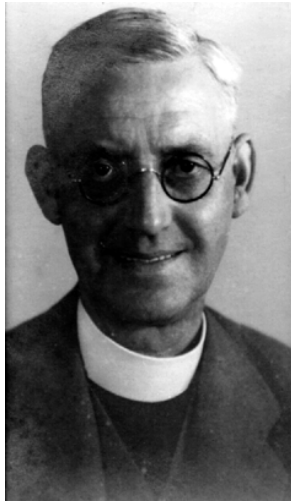
### FREDERICK CONQUER 1918-1920 (No photograph)

Frederick Conquer had been a fishmonger by trade. Called to the ministry, he served pastorates in England before coming to Rondebosch. It was during his time that a Diaconate replaced the old Committee of Management which until then had served to supervise the church along with the Church Meetings. In 1920 Mr Conquer returned to England.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Dower's great nephew Michael Dower, an attorney who practises in the city, was a member of the congregation from 1971 to 1987.

## J.H. ATKINSON 1921-1926

Mr Atkinson served pastorates in Northern Ireland as a Methodist minister before he was called to Rondebosch. He was referred to as 'padre', because he had also served as a chaplain in the First World War. He arrived a bachelor, but was much liked, and it was to the chagrin of several single women in the congregation that he married a widow in 1923! He was a great pastor. A report written in 1922 describes him as 'our Pastor who has gone in and out amongst us with his sympathetic, loving and tactful manner, which won all hearts, and has made him the friend of each one of us'. It was felt that the church made 'real progress' under his leadership and that his sermons brought 'instruction, encouragement and help' to people in their daily duties. During 1925 he apparently became depressed and spoke of resigning, but after 'prayerful consideration by Pastor, Deacons and Management Committee' he was persuaded to stay on. Later that year, however, he took ill, and he remained ill for some months. This led to a fall in enthusiasm and attendance. His recovery and resumption of pastoral duties were welcomed. But in 1926 he finally did resign. He went on to serve the Claremont Congregational Church and later founded the independent United Church at Hermanus. His ministry at our church was still remembered with affection by older members 50 years later.



J.H. Atkinson

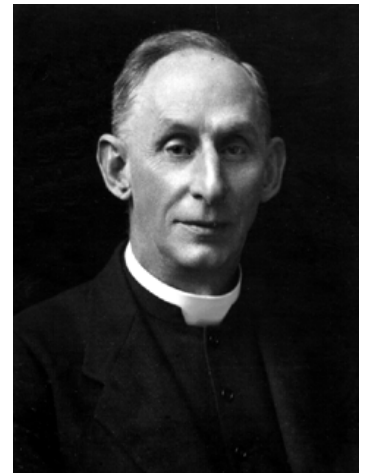
## GEORGE FERGUSON 1927-1931

George Ferguson was a somewhat more sterner looking man than the friendly Mr Atkinson. He began his ministry with a statement of intention that could be inscribed above every pulpit:

I know I will be judged by the standards I set up in my preaching, and I ask you to submit to the same measure. 'Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only.' As an essential part of your fidelity I must ask you to regard attendance at the Sunday services as a first duty. A full church is itself a sermon, and a church with half its benches empty is a protest to the world that the members only half believe the Gospel they profess.... I hope to visit regularly and systematically. If I can be regarded as a personal friend whose visits bring comfort and inspiration, I shall be rewarded.

Within a year he had built up the average Sunday attendance from 60 to 100. In 1927 he was elected Moderator of the Western District. He was also twice elected to the chair of the Congregational Union. A report in 1929 stated that George Ferguson was 'a man full of zeal for the extension of Christ's Kingdom' and that 'his sermons always bear the stamp of culture and devotion to high ideals'.

Unfortunately Mr Ferguson's last two years at Rondebosch were plagued with illness. In 1931 he fell gravely ill. His health was slow in returning, and he felt compelled to resign the pastorate. Later he recovered and in 1940 published a history of the Congregational Union in South Africa, which was particularly useful for its account of the early LMS missionaries and the growth of the Independent churches in South Africa. His daughter, Kitty Abbot, remained a member of this church until her death in 1970.



George Ferguson

## THOMAS AND LILIAN DOWNHAM 1932-1938

Thomas Downham was an Irishman who had pastorates at Que Que in Rhodesia, Ladysmith in Natal and Florida Park before coming to our church. After accepting the call, with his wife and five children in mind, he sent a telegram to the consulent or minister who had looked after the church during the vacancy reading: 'Hold the fort for I am coming when you can accommodate us.' To this the consulent replied, 'After your large mansion you will find five rooms a tight fit, but the garden in front of the house is very spacious, and if you like tents can be erected to take the overflow.'

The congregation, including the young people in it, came to know Mr Downham as 'Tassie'. He had a great knack for building his evening sermons around objects he borrowed from homes he visited to use as visual aids. Young people flocked to these services. He would regularly visit the church badminton club and remind the members to be in church on Sunday!



Thomas Downham



In 1935 Thomas's wife, Lilian Downham, was ordained and appointed co-pastor in the congregation. She was one of the very first women ever to be ordained in South Africa.

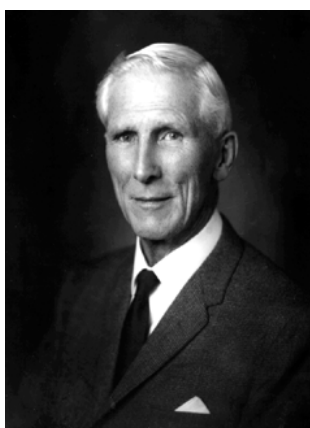
In 1938, however, the Downhams resigned because of Thomas's ill-health. The church recorded their obligation to both the Downhams for their magnificent service, their wholehearted response to their Master's call and their untiring efforts to build up and maintain the cause that was so dear to both of them. They later served a small Congregational Church at Great Brak near Mossel Bay.

## **NOEL TARRANT 1939-1968**

**A**fter serving in a pastorate at Brentford in England, Noel Tarrant came to South Africa in 1924. He first served the Pearson Street Church in Port Elizabeth for 15 years. He began his long ministry at Rondebosch the very week World War II was declared. With it the congregation entered a long period of consolidation and growth. He and his wife, Jess, brought the old English style of parish ministry to Rondebosch. He was often seen striding around Rondebosch, visiting his congregation on foot. The door to the manse, in Weltevreden Avenue, was always open, with a constant coming and going of his 'flock'. His sermons were scriptural but related to everyday life and Christian living. The congregation waited with anticipation on Sunday mornings for his children's talk, which the parents enjoyed as much as the children. He would bend down in the pulpit and lift up an old-fashioned brown leather bag, and as he talked to the children produce a diverse and often amusing array of objects to illustrate his story.

Noel Tarrant was by nature shy, quiet and almost austere. He smoked a pipe, and would sometimes sit with a kindred spirit in almost completely silent relaxation. Even at Diaconate meetings he never tried to influence the discussions but just sit quietly and let the others talk or argue until a decision was reached. But he held strict Christian views and had a depth of compassion and understanding for human frailty. He and his wife Jess engendered great warmth and affection among those who knew them. One member from that time who is still alive describes him as 'a darling'. He was a strong 'temperance' man, but Jess always accepted a sherry. When she then commented, 'Oh, he is an old fuddy-duddy!', he would just smile.

Mr Tarrant was highly respected in the wider Church. The Congregational Union of South Africa



Noel Tarrant

elected him its Chairman in 1934, in 1946 and again in its centenary year of 1959. He was for many years the leading Congregational figure in the land, representing the denomination in contacts both with the Government and with other Churches. When the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa was formed in 1967, he was elected honorary life chairman of it in recognition of his services.

Mr Tarrant was the longest-serving minister the church has had to date, with a ministry that spanned 40 years. He retired in 1968, and was then appointed Minister Emeritus in the congregation. Early in 1976 Mrs Jess Tarrant died. Noel did not long outlast her: in May that year he died and his funeral service was held in the church.

## **GEOFFREY DUNSTAN 1968-1978**

**G**eoffrey Dunstan was born in 1937 and ordained in 1963. He first served a Congregational Church at Cockfosters in north London for 5 years. When Noel Tarrant retired John de Gruchy (then ministering to a congregation in Durban) was recommended to the Diaconate, but, being used to an older minister, it thought John too young. It decided instead to call a Congregationalist from England to add to the small pool of white ministers in the Congregational Union of South Africa. It approached Vernon Miller, a member at Rondebosch who had become the General Secretary of the denomination, and he negotiated with the Congregational Church in England. It recommended Geoffrey Dunstan, who was serving a church in Cockfosters, north London. The congregation agreed to call him – even though it turned out that he was only a year older than John de Gruchy!

Geoffrey accepted the call and came out with his wife Jocynlen ('Jo') and their 2 daughters, Jane and Kate, before the end of 1968. (A third daughter, Philippa, was born in 1970.) His ministry at Rondebosch was characterized by strong emphases on a liturgical order of worship, stewardship, divine healing, ecumenical relations, joint activities with other local churches and the application of the gospel to the political situation in South Africa. He was a good liturgist, blending the traditional and the contemporary in fresh orders of services each week. He read widely and prepared conscientiously and has been described as a thoughtful, often entertaining preacher. His sermons were mainly 'apologetic' (in the good sense of the word) rather than expository and delivered well with a good command of language. People testified to the help they got from his preaching; others unfortunately found it too provocative,



Geoffrey Dunstan

partly on political issues. He was at the height of his effectiveness at midpoint.

From 1971-75 Geoffrey exercised oversight over the Pinelands Congregational Church as well as Rondebosch. In 1976 he became the first chairman of the newly created Peninsula Region of the United Congregational Church. For 5 years or more he and an Anglican priest, Roy Barker, took turns in writing a regular religious column in the *Saturday Argus*. A collection of these articles was published in 1977 under the title *Man Where Are You?*

After almost 11 years at Rondebosch Geoffrey resigned to accept a call to the Bryanston United Church in greater Johannesburg. There, unhappily, his marriage with Jo broke up. He left, remarried and went to Windhoek to take up the position of Director of English Religious Programmes on English radio in South West Africa. After a few years he returned to England, where he now lives with his wife Sandra in Lewes, East Sussex, and is the minister of the local United Reformed Church.

### **JOHN W. DE GRUCHY 1973-**

**J**ohn Wesley de Gruchy studied for his BA and BD degrees at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, his MTh at Chicago Theological Seminary and his DTh through UNISA (1973). His doctoral thesis was on the



John and Isobel de Gruchy

German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He and Isobel Dunstan married in 1961 and their three children, Steve, Jeanelle and Anton were born in 1961, 1965 and 1967. He first served the Sea View Congregational Church in Durban, then the Bryanston Congregational Church and St Mungo's United Church in Bryanston, then the South African Council of Churches in Johannesburg as director of Ecumenical Studies and Communications. While on the staff of the SACC he was Secretary of the Church Unity Commission and also wrote his first book, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. He was appointed a lecturer in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Cape Town in 1973. In the same year he was appointed a self-supporting associate minister in Rondebosch Congregational Church and served officially in that capacity until 1975. In 1980-81 he was chairman of the UCCSA (or 'King Cong', as he called it!) In 1985 he

became Professor of Christian Studies. In 1996 UCT awarded him the degree of DSocSci. In 1998 he was reappointed a self-supporting associate minister at Rondebosch United Church. In 2000 he became Director of the Graduate School in Humanities at UCT. In the same year, at a special service in the Berlin Cathedral, he was awarded the prestigious international Karl Barth Prize as an interpreter of Karl Barth's theology.

Since coming to Cape Town John has served faithfully and creatively on the Diaconate, later the Church Council, and was for many years Church Secretary. He preaches in the church fairly regularly. He has also served on the Finance Committee. John has published numerous articles and books including *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, *Christianity and Democracy*, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, *Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice*, and two books of sermons, *Faith for a Time Like This* and *Seeing Things Differently*

John's wife Isobel led and taught in the Sunday School for many years. She has served as a deacon for most of the time she has been at the church and as Church Secretary/Church Council Secretary for many years. For 21 years she was mainly responsible for organizing and running the Centre of Concern for 21 years. She has also led a Bible study group for many years. John and Isobel's children, especially Steve and Anton, have also been important youth leaders in the church.

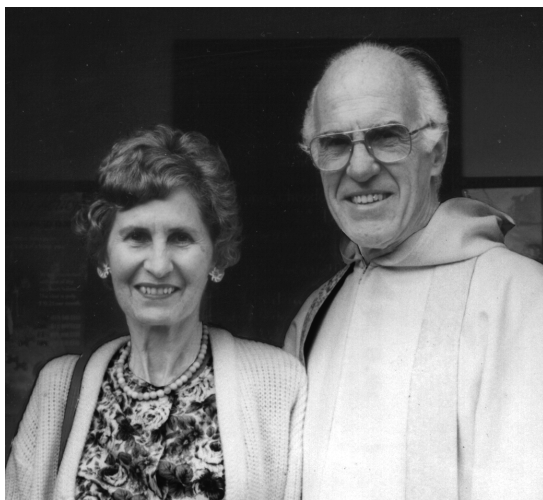
### **JIM COCHRANE 1976-1978**

**J**im Cochrane was a member of the Sea Point Methodist Church under the ministry of Theo Kotze. When Theo left Sea Point to start the Cape Town office of the Christian Institute in Mowbray in 1968, Jim went to work with him. From 1972 to 1975 he studied in the USA. In July 1975 was ordained in the Chicago Metropolitan Chapter of the United Church of Christ USA and later seconded and transferred to the UCCSA. In 1976 he was appointed part-time Youth Pastor in Rondebosch Congregational Church. He built up the teenage church as a group that met in the minor hall and the gallery on Sundays and laid the foundations for what it later became under Di Scott-Saddington. He also sometimes preached.

At the end of 1977 Jim left his job in our church to become lecturer in the Religious Studies Department at UCT. From there went to lecture in the School of Theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, where he later became Assistant Professor and then Head of the Department. Since 1997 he has been back at UCT as a professor in the Department of Religious Studies. He is also Director of the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa, Editor of the *New South African Outlook*, and Editor of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. He has a DMin from Chicago and a PhD from UCT. His publications include *Servants of Power* and *Circles of Dignity*. He is married to Renate, who is also an ordained minister, and they live in Hout Bay with their children, Thembisa, Thandeka and Teboho.

## **DOUGLAS STEPHEN BAX 1979-**

After graduating with a BA and a BD from Rhodes University, Douglas Bax served two small Presbyterian congregations in Bedford and Somerset East for 18 months. He then studied overseas, first at Princeton Theological Seminary and later at the Georg August University in Göttingen, Germany. He returned from overseas toward the end of 1965 and a year later accepted a call to St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cape Town. In 1971 he married Betty Vintcent. In 1973 he became a lecturer in New Testament and in social ethics at St Bede's Theological College in Umtata and pastor at St Andrew's Church in that town. Later, for two years, he served as a temporary lecturer in systematic theology and ethics at Rhodes University.



Douglas and Betty Bax

Douglas was called to Rondebosch at the end of 1978, and the Bax family, including their 4-year-old son Michael, arrived on New Year's Day 1979. Besides his work in the congregation he has been active in committees especially of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. One example was in 1981, when he piloted through the General Assembly a notable decision to embrace civil disobedience against the political policy of apartheid. By this decision the Assembly resolved to:

- disregard the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act by marrying people across the colour bar,
- refuse to apply any longer for permits for multiracial church meetings and
- flout the censorship law in quoting banned people like Dr C.F. Beyers Naudé.

Douglas was elected Moderator of the Cape Town Presbytery and for 1989-90 Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. As such he went to Britain to represent the Presbyterian Church at the General Assemblies of the United Reformed Church, the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. He took with him the Cannondale touring bicycle the Rondebosch congregation had given him. When he arrived on his bicycle at the little

hotel in Wolverhampton that was to provide him with accommodation for the United Reformed Church Assembly, however, the proprietor refused him admission: he could not believe that the cyclist at the front door could be the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa! He later cycled around Wolverhampton and in the Lake District and parts of Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Douglas and Betty's son Michael was very active in Charisma and in leading a youth club while he was at school and at university. Douglas himself has published several articles and the booklet, *A Different Gospel. A Critique of the Theology behind Apartheid* (1979).

When Douglas retires at the end of 2002, it will mean that Rondebosch United Church will have had only three full-time ministers over a period spanning 63 years, a remarkable record!

## **GEORGE MALEK 1978-**

George Malek was born in Egypt. After graduating in the United States with a PhD in theology and another PhD in pastoral counselling, he lived as a monk in a monastery in California. While there he met a South African medical doctor, Elmarie, and they decided to marry and later came to settle in South Africa. George established an Ecumenical Pastoral Institute in Athlone and has given his time to this as its Director. In 1996 he became a probationer in our church for the ministry of the United Congregational Church and was ordained as a self-supporting associate minister in our church on 5 March 1997. He has been involved in teaching at Cornerstone College, in training Anglican clergy and in preaching in many local churches of different denominations. He occasionally visits and preaches at Rondebosch. He also plays a terrific trumpet!

## **ROBERT STEINER 1999 --**

Born in Germany, Robert became fluent in English while a student on exchange in the United States. He studied at the Georg August University in Göttingen and then went to the Free Theological Academy in Giessen, from where he graduated a Master of Divinity. In 1994 he married Christina Schön. They decided to go abroad to further their studies and arrived in South Africa early in 1995. Robert enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch, while Tina started studying at UCT for a BA. One evening in June that year Robert and his friend Juan Garcés were strolling past the church and saw that a service was on. They came in – and stayed, later enrolling as members in the congregation. In 1996 Robert and Tina's son Luca was born. In 1998 he graduated from Stellenbosch as a Master of Theology in New Testament and then enrolled at the University of Cape Town to write a Ph.D. thesis on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, under John de Gruchy. In due course he became a teaching assistant to John.

Meanwhile Robert decided to seek ordination in the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and was appointed



Robert and Tina Steiner

a probationer in the congregation in 1997. Early in 1999 he was ordained and then formally appointed a part-time assistant minister in our church. By this time he had been involved in the Sunday School and with the young people in the church for some time. He was appointed Sunday

School Superintendent in 1999 and together with a team of helpers greatly built up the Sunday School. He started a youth soccer team and later helped form an informal church youth soccer league. With the help of other church members he also started a Youth Club and at the beginning of 2000 an After-School Homework Programme for scholars. He has helped to teach some Sunday School pupils how to play the marimbas. Since 1999 he has shared in running the confirmation courses. Appointed by the Presbytery as the Presbyterian student chaplain to UCT, he has tried to link up with students and has attended the UCT Fellowship of Christian Societies. He also runs a students' house church, now a young adults' house church. He conducts Family Services on the last Sunday of every month and helps with the evening services, playing the piano and sharing the informal 'sermons'-and-discussions with Douglas Bax. Since the end of 1999 he has also served as a spiritual counsellor at St. Luke's Hospice under the supervision of Peter Fox. In 2001 Tina Steiner presented Robert with a second child, Lola.

## More Titbits



View of the Centenary Banner that Douglas Jeary mounted above the front door of the church. The banner was illuminated at night. Sue Smith was responsible for the design and donation of the banner.



Kay Gibson was the first person to propose that the Congregational Church become a United Church – read the history on page 16. She served many years as a Deacon and has been a member of the church since the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1950. She is, in fact, almost the oldest member of the church. She is second only to Brenda Kramer, who became a member on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1950.

## REMINISCENSES

### OUR JOURNEY AS A CONGREGATION

JOHN DE GRUCHY

*For details about John de Gruchy, see page 30 under the section 'Our Ministers Past and Present'.*

A hundred years ago a group of Congregationalists met in the Rondebosch town hall (now the library) and made a commitment to God and to each other to journey together as a congregation of the church of Jesus Christ. We celebrate that event every year in our covenant service that reminds us of that founding event and invites us to share in the journey in faith and hope. In this way we become part of the ongoing story of our congregation, connected with those who went before us and those who will follow. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, the church is not a static institution but a pilgrim people travelling together towards God's future both for ourselves and for the world as a whole.

The time for starting a new church in Rondebosch was not auspicious. South Africa was at war. Indeed, there was no South Africa, only British colonies and Boer republics. Of course, those early Rondebosch Congregationalists, probably all of whom were proudly loyal to the Empire, would have been confident that Britain would defeat the Boers, but they would not have anticipated how long and bloody the conflict was going to be. Nor could they have foreseen how much bitterness the war would create between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans, or the extent to which it would lead to the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism and eventually to apartheid. And, of course, within not much more than a decade members of the congregation would be serving in the trenches in France during the First World War.

All of that lay in the future. But in covenanting together they were committing themselves and generations to come to journeying into that future in faith in God and in fellowship with each other. Like Abraham of old, they did not exactly know where their journey would lead, but they went out trusting that the Holy Spirit who had brought them together would guide them in following Jesus Christ

wherever he would take them. In these times of considerable change, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future, it is good to recall the faith of those who founded our congregation at the beginning of a tumultuous century.

Some might say that these reflections are, in retrospect, a little romantic. Knowing ourselves, I suspect that those founding fathers and mothers had all kinds of motives for starting our congregation. For one thing they did not want to be Anglicans (St. Paul's was already standing proudly on the hill) or join the Methodists in Rosebank. Yet, for them, there were also theological principles involved in taking the step they did. They did not accept the notion of an established church (Anglican), and their Calvinist and non-Conformist roots gave them a sense of the church as a covenanted community that was distinct from the Methodists. Given our ecumenical understanding today, these issues are far less divisive and for many in our congregation they may have little significance. Yet these convictions were important to the founders of our congregation, and the sense of the church as a community of committed disciples remains important for us.

By the time the Rondebosch congregation was established, Congregational churches existed in many suburbs of Cape Town. Union Congregational Church was founded in 1824, Harrington Street, in 1839, Claremont in 1840, Sea Point in 1845, and Observatory in 1894. Congregationalism had also spread to the outlying areas of the western Cape, notably to Paarl. Moreover, the work of the London Missionary Society was well established throughout southern Africa by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The connection between the Rondebosch Congregational church and the LMS can be seen from the fact that John Moffat, son of the famous LMS missionary Robert Moffat, laid the foundation stone for our church building. Another indication was the decision to place Johannes van der Kemp's tomb stone in the entrance porch. The latter is particularly noteworthy because van der Kemp at that time was widely regarded amongst Europeans as one of the enemies of the white settler community. It is difficult to know precisely what the racial and political attitudes of our forefathers and foremothers were, probably much the same as many other white middle-class people of the time in the colony. Yet, the fact

that they did identify in these ways with the LMS suggests that they were probably a little more liberal than most, something that has also characterised our congregation through the past century.

One of the important aspects of our journey throughout the past century has been the connection between the congregation and the university. Not too long after our church was founded, UCT moved to its new location on the slopes of Devil's Peak, so the church was already established and able to welcome both staff and students. There have no been any formal links, of course, but countless students and staff have been members, or at least worshipped, at RonCong as the church became known. This has been a significant connection. At times it has given the congregation a particular flavour, some would say too academic, but others would counter by saying that it has enabled the church to provide strong leadership within the community.

My own connection with Rondebosch began in 1957 when I was first asked to preach in the church. At the time I was a student at UCT intending to go into the ministry. I well recall that evening service (the main service in those days) with its large choir and full congregation. I also recall from that time, and through subsequent years, the remarkable ministry of Noel Tarrant, who served the church for thirty years from 1939 to 1969. Tarrant was a tall, dignified man, and while not a great preacher (he loved the Old Testament and often preached from it, he was a beloved pastor. In those days almost all the members of our church lived in and around Rondebosch, and Tarrant was often seen walking around the suburb on the way to make a pastoral call. During his ministry the congregation grew significantly in size and became one of the major churches in the Congregational Union (which predated the formation of the United Congregational Church). Youth work flourished, as many still recall, and there were several other very strong organisations, such as the Women's Association. Our hall was also built during Tarrant's ministry and was named after him. Maybe we should return to calling it the Tarrant Hall to remind us of that period in our journey.

Isobel and I, along with our three children, joined the congregation in May 1973 when we settled in Rosebank and I began to teach at UCT. I was also appointed an associate minister, a position I held for two years and one that was reinstated again a few years ago. The minister at the time was Geoffrey Dunstan who had been called from his congregation in London to serve Rondebosch in 1969.

Geoffrey and his wife, Jo, were young and dynamic, and brought about many changes, not all of them liked by older members of the congregation! I recall them both complaining about how staid and comfortable the congregation had become, and how, despite its more liberal attitudes, it was really not very different from the rest of white society. Geoffrey certainly shook us all up and prepared the way for the congregation to deal with the very difficult years that were to follow when the church struggle against apartheid became far more intense and directly affected our church. Geoffrey was also more

liturgical in his worship style than Tarrant, introducing some very creative orders of service and encouraging the congregation to become far more involved as participants.

In 1975 the church buildings were also substantially renovated and changed. Most noteworthy was the erection of the new vestries and offices at the back of the church; the relocation of the organ and its pipes to their present position; and the rearrangement of the sanctuary area. Nevil Louw was the architect, and for those of us who have worshipped in both the old and new sanctuary, the improvements were wonderful. Gone was the enormous pulpit (which could hold about five people) which dominated everything. And the removal of the organ console and pipes, which were right at the centre (where the Table is now located) opened up the wonderful space we now have for worship. Noel Tarrant, who still worshipped at Rondebosch, participated in the service at which the renovations were dedicated and offered the prayers of blessing. Thus the old and new blended together, opening up fresh possibilities for worship and witness in the future.

Geoffrey Dunstan received a call from St. Mungo's United Church in Bryanston, Johannesburg, and left Rondebosch towards the end of 1979. I was appointed acting minister and had the task of helping the congregation find a new minister. But who was that to be?

One of our ministers, then teaching at Rhodes University, contacted me and suggested the name of Douglas Bax. Doug and I had been at Rhodes together, though he was several years ahead of me, and we had had contact through the ensuing years in various ways. So I knew Doug reasonably well and felt that perhaps he was the right person. A few years previously the General Assemblies of the UCCSA and the Presbyterian Church had resolved that ministers from the two denominations could accept calls from any of their congregations, so there was no problem in investigating the possibility of calling a Presbyterian. Moreover that year the UCCSA Assembly was held in Port Elizabeth, which enabled me to visit Douglas and Betty in Grahamstown, where Doug was teaching. I managed to persuade him at least to come to Rondebosch to 'preach with a view to a call', as our procedures require. Whether I could persuade the Deacons and Church Meeting to call Douglas Bax was another matter – and his sermon that Sunday when he came to preach was not one designed to please everyone! In fact I still think Doug was intent on ensuring that we would not call him! Despite this both the Church Council and the Church Meeting were unanimous in extending the call, though I suspect they were also a little fearful of what might happen.

The Dunstans left in December that year and no sooner had they vacated the manse in Weltevreden Avenue than the Baxes moved in! That must have been something of a record. Indeed, our congregation has seldom been without a minister for any length of time, and for the past sixty years there have only been three!

Much could be said about our journey during these past twenty years under Douglas' leadership, and others

have told their side of the story in other articles and accounts in this centenary booklet. But let me briefly highlight four things, all of which were anticipated in the sermon that Doug preached when he first came to 'preach with a view.' The first has been a concern to develop a congregation that is well trained in a knowledge of the Bible and Christian theological insight. This has happened not only through sermons but also in various other ways as well, not least through the house churches. The second has been a concern to be relevant to the context in which we live in South Africa, and to engage in a prophetic witness to God's demand for social justice. This became the focus of much of the life of the congregation during the 1980's, when our church provided a home for many young (and not so young) Christian activists, notably those who were conscientious objectors. The third has been a concern for a worship style that is both rooted in good Christian liturgical tradition and yet open to fresh and contemporary input. The fourth concern has been that of ecumenical commitment. This found its most symbolic expression when, in 1985, we decided to become a united Congregational and Presbyterian Church. We were not the first to take this path, but nonetheless it was an important witness at a time when the two denominations had failed to achieve union. Of course, our congregation is made up of people of many different church backgrounds, and is today far more ecumenical in that respect as well than at any other time in our history. Not too many churches in our tradition have been visited by the Patriarch of Alexandria, Pope Shenouda!

We have had an abundance of ministers belonging to our congregation, one of whom, Vernon Miller, was the General Secretary of the Congregation Union for many years. Several people from our congregation have also gone into the ordained ministry during the past two decades. Steve de Gruchy, Tinus Nienaber, and Craig Morrison were all called to the ministry while a members of the congregation; Henry Lague, who was formerly a Methodist minister, became a member and was later inducted to the Observatory Congregational Church; and more recently both George Malek and Robert Steiner have been ordained in our church and become associate ministers. Each has contributed to the shaping our of journey together.

So our journey continues into this new century. I am not sure that those founding pioneers who met in the Rondebosch town hall would agree with all the changes that have taken place during the past one hundred years, but then they would not recognise either the suburb of Rondebosch or the new South Africa! But I do believe that they would agree that the journey on which they embarked has turned into a remarkable story, with both its high and low points!

Most importantly, through the ministry of the congregation many people have discovered new life in Jesus Christ, many have found the strength of the Holy Spirit to deal with the challenges which face us all in our own personal journeyings, and week by week, month by month, and year by year a congregation of faithful people

has gathered to worship God in 'spirit and in truth.' I personally believe that in significant ways, Rondebosch United Church has provided a vision of what the church in South Africa can and should be at this historic moment. May the journey continue, may we continue to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and may subsequent generations reflect back on the next phase in the saga with gratitude.

## RONDEBOSCH UNITED CHURCH – BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON A MOMENT IN HISTORY

JIM COCHRANE

*For details about Jim Cochrane, see page 30 under the section 'Our Ministers Past and Present'.*

This local church has a history of involvement in social concerns that many people, at least from a predominantly white community, perhaps thought risky, foolish or downright unacceptable. This was particularly true in the mid-nineteen seventies, when I was there.

The Dunstons were in the manse at the time, and both Geoff and Jo supported 'suspect' organizations like the beleaguered Christian Institute of Southern Africa – an organization feared for its willingness to stand against the prevailing logic of apartheid and challenging the state on matters of military service, torture, detention, and the like. Both of them found ways of expressing personal abhorrence to the apartheid system. Jo, for instance, assisted in running many events at the Anglican Cathedral in the city which became well known for its leadership at the time.

After studying for my M.Div. in Chicago I returned from the US in 1976 and was due to take up an appointment as minister of the Observatory Congregational Church. When this church then suddenly turned me down, perhaps because of 'suspect' personal links I had and said I would nurture with the Christian Institute Cape office, John de Gruchy raised the matter at the Regional Council. As a result, Geoff Dunstan offered me a part-time job as Youth Pastor at Rondebosch. I was appointed with a part-time stipend (and occasionally also preached).

The youth work of the church had faltered for some time. It was my job to resuscitate it. With the support of the Dunstons and the Diaconate I undertook an experimental youth programme. It tried to bridge several of the divides of that time, many of which still plague us. Perhaps its theme, taken from Ross Snyder's way of capturing the ecclesiology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, could be described in the words 'Christ takes form in a band of people.' Its dominant Christological perspective, also from

Bonhoeffer, was that Jesus was 'the man for others'.

This tender band of people who now began to find each other included white and black youth, young men and women in their teens and older, some uncertain of their faith, and one or two even of another faith (Islam). Among them was Steve de Gruchy, now a UCCSA minister and lecturer in theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

What drove their commitment to each other, and to engagement with other young people and their problems, as well as engagement with the problems of the society of the time, was a deepening sense that they were part of a larger vision of God's grace for the world. They felt they were transcending the barriers erected by human beings between each other for the sake of a whole and healed world. They learned to take seriously that God sent God's Son to save *the world* (the *kosmos*), the promise that a new City of Jerusalem would be established *on earth*, where there would be no more tears.... This vision made sense even to those who could not profess Christianity as their personal faith. It was a truly ecumenical group.

Others in the Christian family could not understand this kind of witness. Dorothea Scarborough (who was then at Sea Point Congregational Church and later led the campaign to discontinue our membership in the World Council of Churches that split the UCCSA) even attacked what I was doing as the 'devil's work'! This did not deter the Rondebosch church from supporting, with pride, the energetic vision and activity of its young people.

We should not forget what kind of a time this was. While I was there the now iconic days of 'Soweto 1976', the revolt of South Africa's black youth against apartheid, happened. People we knew were detained, tortured, some killed. Soon after I handed over the Rondebosch youth work, the Christian Institute and its leaders were banned, along with Black Consciousness organizations and two newspapers.

Those were dark days, heavy days, days during which the kind of witness we were expecting of our youth at 'Rondebosch Cong' as it was called, was not to be taken lightly. The values and virtues generated in the cauldron of those times, through the kind of work the church supported among its youth, with many senior members providing personal backing when it was needed, were of great significance.

In 1978 I was appointed a Junior Lecturer at UCT and moved from being Youth Pastor to being a member of the Diaconate. Di Scott took over the youth work from me, and she made an enormous contribution both locally and nationally to youth work in the UCCSA. We were building leaders for the future of our country and beyond. Such values and virtues, such vision and commitment, such willingness to see one's life in relation to the needs and cries of others and to the well-being of all—they mark a ministry that must still go on.

## MY ASSOCIATION WITH RONDEBOSCH UNITED CHURCH

PETER MOLL

*Peter Moll is now based in Washington DC. He works for the World Bank as a consultant for investments in Africa.*

'I was in prison and you came to me'  
(Matt. 25:36)

I first heard of Douglas Bax as a result of the controversial resolution which he proposed to the South African Council of Churches at Hammanskraal in 1974, suggesting that on account of the injustice of apartheid young men should consider refusing military service. This turned out to be one of the most important influences on my thinking.

In 1979, while working as a trainee actuary in the Old Mutual in Cape Town, I received a call-up from the Army for a 15-day army camp. I refused to go, declaring myself a conscientious objector, because I had become convinced that on the basis of my Christian faith I could not fight in defence of apartheid. I was imprisoned in the Pretoria Detention Barracks for 12 months. Because I refused to do military duty while imprisoned, I was placed in solitary confinement off and on for a total of 139 days.

There followed a remarkable outpouring of concern and interest from people of goodwill in South Africa and all over the world. People wrote letters, arranged vigils, organized publicity, and tried to ease the conditions under which I and other conscientious objectors had been imprisoned, and sought to promote peace-making in many ways. Members of Rondebosch United Church (then Rondebosch Congregational Church) were in the forefront of this growing war-resistance/peace-making effort. Here is a quotation from one of Doug Bax's letters to me in detention barracks (July 13, 1980):

Some of us held a vigil for you and Richard [Steele] last night. We held you up in our thoughts and our prayers. We are of course all very distressed at the repeated periods of solitary confinement you and Richard are having to spend. It is really a kind of irrational sadism on the part of the SADF and the Department of Defence. I am glad nevertheless that you are coming through it OK and managing to sail on an even keel.

You must be tempted at times to depression or despair. You must also be tempted to show resentment. May God uphold you with His Spirit at all such times. I know how much you depend on Him, and therefore that He does give you the strength that you need, not only to endure but to do so with a gentle spirit.

Doug Bax and others helped arrange voluntary donations to pay back my bursary to the Old Mutual, which had fired me for not appearing at work for a year



and which wanted their money back. In addition, a vigil of thanksgiving was held at Rondebosch Congregational on 22-23 August 1980 – because I and Richard Steele had been accorded the status of conscientious objectors while in detention barracks, and had therefore been taken out of solitary confinement.

Upon my release in December 1980 I returned to Cape Town. I received a request from Doug to do a question-and-answer session as the sermon one Sunday at Rondebosch United Church. Doug led the ‘evidence’, so to speak, about how I had become convinced that my Christian faith was incompatible with apartheid, and so I could not in moral honesty go to the Army. The congregation listened with rapt attention. Thus began my association with Rondebosch United Church. I eventually became a member in 1984.

Rondebosch United Church was a continual source of inspiration and spiritual assistance to me and to many others who were working through the painful issue of military service and how to be peace-makers. Members of Rondebosch United Church contributed to the movement against conscription and for conscientious objection in many ways. Conscientious Objectors’ Support Group meetings were held at Rondebosch United Church in the mid-1980s. Many meetings of support for individual conscientious objectors were held there. The End Conscription Campaign held a fair on the church property in 1988.

I am now living and working in the United States. Whenever I pass through South Africa I make a point of visiting my former church. I am still a member of a Congregational church here, one of the important reasons being that this denomination has a strong interest in social action.

## THREE GIFTS OF RONDEBOSCH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

SIEVE DE GRUCHY

*Dr. Steve de Gruchy is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Theology, University of Natal. A member of the UCCSA’s Task Force on the Challenge to the Church, he was also the editor of the Congregational Chronicle from 1994-97. He was most recently the Director of the Kuruman Moffat Mission, and edited the book, Changing Frontiers: The Mission Story of the UCCSA, for the Bicentenary of the arrival of the LMS in southern Africa in 1999.*

I was a member of Rondebosch Congregational, now United, Church from the time of my confirmation in 1975 until I began my ministry at Gleemoor Congregational Church in 1990. It was and is ‘mother-church’ for me, and has shaped much of my faith, ministry and theology even today 10 years since I left its warm interior, high vaulted ceiling and powerful pipe organ. Like the magi

unto the Christ-child, Rondebosch gave me three gifts, and whilst they are not in the order of gold, frankincense and myrrh they have been invaluable to me as a Christian in South Africa.

First, it gave me a sense of belonging to the Body of Christ. Rondebosch Congregational Church has a great history of engagement in the story of Congregationalism in southern Africa. The tombstone of Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp, first LMS missionary to South Africa, is in the porch, and of course John Smith Moffat, the son of another great LMS missionary, Robert Moffat, laid the foundation stone of the church. In more recent times, Noel Tarrant and Arthur Fraser had served CUSA in various capacities, and of course the Church was always used as the meeting place for the Peninsula Regional Council. As I got involved in youth work in the church, and through the ministry of the then youth worker, Di Scott, I began to experience more of what that wider family really meant in a racially divided South Africa. Di initiated the first Regional Youth Council in the Peninsula - and this was soon replicated throughout the denomination - and brought together young Congregationalists from a range of racial backgrounds. As a young white male I was privileged to worship in ‘coloured’ and black churches in the late 70s and early 80s, and to feel part of something bigger than just my own language and racial group.

Through the work of the Youth Councils I was elected as a youth representative to UCCSA assemblies in 1980, 81 and 82, and began to feel a part of the denomination as a whole. Also in 1980, Rondebosch Congregational helped Michelle Sandilands and me to be part of the South African Council of Churches sponsored ‘Pilgrimage of Hope’ to the Holy Land and Taizé. It was a life-changing experience for me, for apart from other things it was whilst at Taizé that I felt the sharp Word of call into the ministry that culminated in my ordination in the UCCSA 12 years later.

But it was not only in this wider sense that the Church taught me about the Body of Christ. The space afforded to young people in its worship life, and in the church meetings, the experiments in house-churches and fellowship services (soup and worship in the upper hall once a month!), the generational mix and the ability to nurture a diversity of opinion within itself - all of these have left me with a profound sense of the possibilities of the Church and Congregationalism in particular. Due to its openness to the wider church, its encouragement of cross-racial ties and the quality of its witness, Rondebosch continues to make an impression upon me whenever I think about the ministry of the local church.

This gift remains a challenge for the new generation at Rondebosch. Is this sense of the Church still to be found there? Are young people still being nurtured in this way? Are the links with the wider church still real? I pray that this gift continues to be offered in the next 100 years.

If the first gift is tied up with Congregationalism, I have a Presbyterian to largely thank for the second. This is the gift of the political witness of our faith. Doug Bax’s prophetic ministry at Rondebosch in the 1980s around the

issues of Civil Disobedience and Conscientious Objection were key to the shaping of my own faith in the light of the growing militarisation, racial polarisation and political intolerance of the last decade of apartheid. I have often pondered the fact that many young people of my generation left the church when they became politically aware at university. I have Doug Bax and Rondebosch Congregational to thank for the fact that I found a stronger sense of faith and discipleship growing in the light of that political awareness. Doug's involvement in the support of CO's, a memorable speech he gave to a packed student audience at UCT, his evidence at a SUCA trial in which I and a number of others were accused under the Riotous Assemblies Act (for doing street theatre!), and his regular sermons on the 'hot topics' of the day created an atmosphere at Rondebosch that was good to dwell within.

The Church to its credit - and this is the point I am making - stood by Doug and so made it the witness of the congregation rather than just the minister. Too many progressive white ministers were either forced out of their churches, or left of their own volition, because their churches could not bear to hear them out on the issues of the day. It was close at times! But there was a particular moment in 1980 soon after Doug arrived, in which the Diaconate voted 6-6 to allow a prayer vigil for CO's Peter Moll and Richard Steel to take place in the church, and Doug cast his deciding vote in favour. Within weeks the losers and their families left the church, and there was a question mark over the future of the ministry. But it was the right decision and helped shape the witness the Rondebosch gave in the white community in the 1980s. The Church buildings became an important place for many university students involved in anti-apartheid work, even if they never came on a Sunday to worship. The first meetings of the End Conscription Campaign were held in our hall, and a number of key events - such as commemorations of June 16<sup>th</sup> took place in the sanctuary itself.

This gift was a gift of the times in one important regard - in the 1980s it was rooted firmly and almost exclusively in the white community. The challenge to embrace the diversity of all God's people is a challenge for all churches in South Africa. With its background and sensitivities I pray that this gift will continue to be offered to the next century of worship, work and witness.

The third gift from Rondebosch was the space in which to nurture my own gifts, and in particular the space to be chaotically creative. From the moment Di Scott started *Charisma* in 1979 things got exciting. Guitars were played. Dance was introduced. Crazy and creative ideas began to surface. We produced three multi-media productions before SABC-TV understood the term. I helped to draft the scripts and wrote the music. The Easter musical, *Who Rolled the Rock?* set us off on the roller-coaster ride, followed by *The Dance* on the book of Acts, and then *The Fugitive*, the Christmas story. It was one of those serendipitous moments in which there were musicians, actors, energy, and a free hand from the church leadership.

Out of this mix came the impulses into worship that saw the creation of the orchestra in the evening worship services, the deep experience of Taize-style worship in the church, and ultimately to the *Eucharist for Unity*, a Jazz Eucharist that I wrote for the occasion on which the Church became a United Church. Still later I used the experiences that I gained at Rondebosch to write *What would Jesus do?* for the Youth at Gleemoor Congregational Church, a production that was performed at the 1993 UCCSA Assembly, and was later produced as a video. It was such fun to recapture for these young people the joy that Rondebosch had given me 10 years earlier.

Although the energy was youthful and chaotic, the interesting thing (in retrospect) was how the aesthetics of the Church building and integrity of the liturgy kept things within a rhythm and pace that never lost its bearings. I think we managed to keep the focus on worshipping God rather than ourselves or our music, and hope we created a way in which to draw a congregation into worship rather than just have a private spiritual experience for ourselves.

This gift is a gift of openness to the gifts of the congregation. Over time these will change with the natural ebb and flow of life. What Rondebosch managed to do was to nurture rather than crush the young people who really wanted to make use of the talents God had given them. As the Church enters its second century I hope that this gift too will continue to be visited upon the generations to come.

## REMINISCENCES ABOUT 'RONCONG'

CRAIG MORRISON

*Craig Morrison is the son of Daphne Wilson in our congregation. He shared the leadership of Charisma with David Harrison as a voluntary Youth Leader in 1989-1990. He studied at a local Bible College and graduated with an AFTS from the Federal Theological Seminary in Imbali, Pietermaritzburg. He was ordained to the ministry in the UCCSA in 1995. He and his wife Jenni have served St John's Congregational Church in Farrarmere, Benoni, and are now serving the Congregational Church in Serowe, Botswana. They have two children, Aimee and Stuart.*

I was a student (what they now call a 'learner') at St. Joseph's College - the Catholic boys' school in Rondebosch. The robes and incense that formed part of the chapel worship appealed to me. I was twelve years old and came to the conclusion that I wanted to be a priest. My name was always drawn for processional duty for Friday morning Mass, and later, when I sang in the school choir, the incense would rise up rapidly to smother the choir loft. I loved it.

So my surprise with the family car heading to school for Mass one Sunday morning turned to horror when I

realised we were not going to my school chapel but to the stone church across Belmont Road. And it was a Protestant church, at that!

'Charisma' was the youth project run by Di Scott-Saddington. CHARISMA - a beautiful-sounding word that evokes some of my best memories of 'RonCong' (as the church was fondly known back then.) On my first visit to RonCong I was pulled out of the church service and lured upstairs by young, fresh-looking, teenage girls. 'This is cooler than Mass,' I thought excitedly.

Up the marble stairs in the Minor Hall, a bevy of older, smouldering, wild-eyed girls played havoc with my pubescent hormones. I didn't notice any of the boys! There was a dark-haired, Mediterranean-brown beauty, whose name I found out was Deborah. She was the girlfriend of someone called Steve. Anyway, Di Scott was friendly and affable, and she introduced me to everyone: Gabriella, Tracey, Deborah, Fiona, Nikki, Angela, Steve... STEVE!

They all sat holding their guitars and songbooks. Everyone was so friendly. We smiled. We acted. We debated. We designed collages. We chatted. We played games. We sang. We hugged. We prayed. They welcomed me and accepted me, and became friends. Charisma, was a wonderful gift to RonCong.

One Easter, we put on a passion play in the church called, *Who Rolled The Rock?* I played a shepherd or some character who ran full steam into a pew. Rolling around shrieking, 'Aahhhhh! !! \$%&\*#!' wasn't really in the script! Later, I appeared as Jesus after the crucifixion, rolled up in a white [burial] sheet. It was great fun, most of which was orchestrated by Steve and Deborah.

In 1982 the church held a Mission and invited the Revd. George Irvine as the guest preacher. He was engaging. And when he invited the congregation to accept Jesus personally and to give our lives to the Lord, I went forward and George prayed for me. It was a really special time, and I felt my life had been touched in a significant way. Isobel de Gruchy counselled me on my own and prayed for me again even when words failed me.

Later on I became the leader of Charisma but it was a lean time by then, with very few members. We struggled on with about seven youth, mostly the Smith-Georgeu children. When I was at Bible college, I began from scratch with the very young youth, visiting them each on my scooter, and built up Charisma into a sizeable group again. David Harrison joined the leadership team and was a resourceful addition who got us hiking in the mountains and singing the *Kyrie eleison!* Charisma in the late 1980s was a very intelligent group of young people, and we piled on the fun.

Douglas is a special friend. He has somehow kept me focused with timely counsel and wise words. Often we don't tell people enough how much they mean to us. In many ways, I see him as a kind of mentor, although it is impossible to emulate a perfectionist! More than once I have been told my preaching is reminiscent of Douglas Bax! Not intentionally of course, but when you grow up listening to a good preacher, some of it will (hopefully)

always shine through!

So thank you, Douglas, for your encouragement and your humour.

There were some other folk I'd mention: Betty Bax, Kay Gibson, John and Anton de Gruchy, the Shays, the office secretaries Nan and Jean, Tinus and Maria Nienaber (who spent part of their honeymoon cooking for my confirmation camp!), members of the Bax Bible Study group, and almost everyone who was around between 1980 and 1990.

In 1990, I left what was then Rondebosch United Church-'in-brackets-Congregational and Presbyterian'-and went to the Federal Theological Seminary (FedSem) in Pietermaritzburg. The programme I was on allowed me to take 40% of my courses at FedSem, 40% at the University of Natal-Pietermaritzburg, and 15% at St. Joseph's Scholasticate in Cedara - a Catholic seminary. (I think about 5% was at the Cock-and-Bull!)

Well, I'm nearly - but not quite - a priest, and I'm happily married with a brilliant family. It is all thanks to a youth group called Charisma, a few overactive teenage hormones, and the little Protestant church along Belmont Road!

## 'JUST CALL ME DOUGLAS'

FIONA MCLENNAN

*Fiona McLennan is a lawyer who at one time worked for the Legal Resources Centre. She is now married to Howard Pearce, a Senior Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering at UCT, and they have two children, Caitlin and Angus. She served the church as a deacon in the mid-1980s.*

The first thing that attracted me to Rondebosch United Church happened in 1980 (when it was still 'Ron Con'). My mother came home and informed us that the new minister wanted us to call him 'Douglas' rather than 'Mr Bax', which was a huge departure from the norm. I had been thinking about being confirmed (having resisted Anglican attempts at school) and was then visited by Di Scott, who was so friendly and welcoming that I soon joined the confirmation class and also Charisma. I can only say that Charisma was one of the best things that could have happened to me at that time. Not only did I meet all sorts of people, at least several of whom are still very close friends, but I was swept into a church community where our spare time was spent doing interesting and creative things like Steve de Gruchy's various productions such as 'Who rolled the rock?'. What further impressed me about the church and about Doug in particular, was the way he trusted us. He used to let us do the whole production and then only check it out at the dress rehearsal, to vet it for heresy!

To be able to use the church building for these kinds of things, to attend vigils, to see that the church was

relevant to our society in an exciting and also scary way – all these things made me convinced of the importance of this church and of Douglas’s ministry to us all. Doug opened my eyes to what was going on in the country, and in his clear and unyielding integrity, modelled a way to live, in both one’s personal and one’s work life.

In addition, the younger members of the church were given opportunities to speak and be heard. I have always felt that this is one of the strengths of our church: that it is prepared to listen to the younger members as well as to the older. It is a sobering thought that I used to be one of those younger members – now, twenty years later, I suppose I have to rethink that! Howard and I have been deeply blessed to be part of this community for many years (with a Methodist interlude), having met here, been married here, and managing to have at least one of our children baptised by Doug. In the same way, my whole family has been supported in good times and bad by Doug’s sincere support and caring. We hope to be around and involved for a good many years yet, and wish Rondebosch United an even better second century.

## REFLECTIONS OF A FAKE GRANDMOTHER

DAVID HARRISON

*David Harrison is a medical doctor with postgraduate degrees from UCT and the University in California (Berkeley) in health planning and public policy respectively. He now heads up loveLife, the largest NGO working against HIV/AIDS in South Africa. He is married to Claudine Bill, who was also a member of our church and is now a doctor. They have two daughters, Andrea and Alyssa.*

From the patio of St John’s Hostel – a home for serious rotters and a few genuine saints placed there by juvenile court – I watched the pall of smoke over the Cape Flats. It was 1985, and the Groot Krokodil thrashed this way and that, trying to dismember any opposition. Unable to attend church, I listened to the service on His Masters’ Voice – SABC Radio – that week from the Congregational Church in Rondebosch. The minister was formal and precise (some would say punctilious). But what grabbed me was his flagrant disregard for the rules of the regime’s propaganda machine. Where other ministers spoke timidly of ‘the need for racial harmony’, this cleric spoke of the injustice of apartheid and the oppressive State of Emergency. Next Sunday was my first at Ron-Cong.

There, in no particular chronological order, I met and married Claudine; accompanied the minister in drag (me, not him) on numerous Argus Cycle Tours; was the subject of a well-attended meeting praying that I would be found – and a less well-attended thanksgiving meeting when I

actually was; led congregants in a number of weekend hikes rivalling the morning service in numbers; and took a solemn oath never again to be on a Church Council. Following is an abridged, but entirely objective, account of the events alluded to above.

Claudine Bill married me in the Rondebosch United Church in 1993. Given that this union took place in the sanctuary before God and a motley array of assembled friends, she now has no choice but to have and to hold from that day forth and forever more. Whether this is, for her, a cause of great resentment against the United Church, I cannot say. But we now have a lovely daughter and another baby on the way.

Which I guess, flies in the face of the next revelation, namely my penchant for cross-dressing. And it is perhaps an indictment on the church that no effort was made to counsel me in this regard. On the contrary, it is hereby recorded that the very reverend Douglas Bax *accompanied* the indomitable grandmother Ms Charlotte Ann Conman on several occasions in the annual Argus Cycle Tour! With skirt flying, wig askew and spectacles obscured by perspiration, Ms Conman pedalled triumphantly across many a finish line – her only moment of indecision involving the appropriate venue to relieve herself of liquid refreshments imbibed along the way. How to put a positive spin on this aberrant ecclesiastical behaviour (this after all, being a report to celebrate RUC and not to dredge up foul sludge)? Let me put it down to the open and affirming nature of RUC, which recognises the diversity of people and respects each person’s worth.

It was at Rondebosch Congregational Church that I experienced my fifteen minutes – oh, all right – one week of fame. Hiking in the Natal Drakensberg with four others, we were hit by a huge blizzard, got lost and several days later were given up for dead. It was with much glee that I was later informed that 40 people turned up in the early hours of the morning to pray for our safe return, but only half that number managed to rouse themselves to attend prayers of thanksgiving the following day. I can only assume that the other twenty had already turned their attention to the resolution of yet another of the world’s pressing problems....

Ironically, this near-catastrophe served to swell the numbers of congregants going on weekend hikes with me, prompting the maxim, ‘The church that hikes together misses the Sunday service.’ Not that we got away from God. Some of the most memorable spiritual moments took place in the cathedrals of Cedarberg, Groot Winterhoek and Langeberg.

Speaking of memorable moments brings me to church council meetings. By their very nature, church council meetings find it hard to compete with the fascinating shenanigans of company boards. When commercial business gets tedious, it’s always possible to spice things up by ‘unbundling the company’, firing the MD or throwing in a go-go girl for entertainment. Now by definition, it would go against the grain for the United Church to start ‘unbundling’; the minister didn’t earn enough to be considered gainfully employed, so firing was

hardly an option; and recruitment of a go-go girl was bound to attract the eagle-eyes of the church's dowager patrons. Neither, at least not during my tenure, could fellow deacons be relied upon to provide light relief by stabbing each other in the back – a preoccupation, I am told, of executive committees in some other churches. The result was a series of solid, productive council meetings that underpinned the numerous activities of Rondebosch United Church. Fair enough, but I still regret not tabling a motion in favour of a go-go girl....

It's now nearly ten years since I left Cape Town and tried to find a similar church. And therein lies the rub, and RUC must bear at least some responsibility for the spiritual waywardness of its ex-congregants. Compared to the vibe and searching and debating we were used to, most churches we tried out seemed like a RUC church council meeting. We still think of RUC as our home, and take every opportunity to attend services and visit friends.

During the dark 1980s and the rollercoaster 90s Rondebosch United Church has been a clarion voice for justice and equity for all. As church leaders, Doug and Betty Bax continue to shape the lives of many. For this fake grandmother, RUC is a real gumsmacker!

## SUNLIGHT THROUGH STAINED GLASS

JUDY COOKE

*Judy Cooke has an MA in research psychology. She has taught in a school for autistic children and worked for Cape Mental Health and now works for FAMSA. She is married to Julian Cooke, who was Professor of Architecture at UCT, and they have three sons, Justin, Matthew and Adam, and three grandchildren.*

Rondebosch Congregational Church – as it was in 1980 when I first encountered it – was simply the stone church over the bridge in Belmont Road. But it also became the place with the 'nice' Sunday School that our youngest son wanted to go to with his school friend – and to which, all unwitting I one Sunday took him. I slipped into church, grateful for a church that welcomed unknown children and their parents, noticing the warm smiles of the people at the door, and a plaque set in the wall at the entrance to the memory of Johannes van der Kemp – the name of a person I remembered was much castigated in my school history books for being one of those 'troublesome' missionaries who upset the authorities more than somewhat. So this church belonged in *that* tradition!

I sat in the unfamiliar dimensions of a Congregational church's architecture – broad, encompassing, homely almost, and not specially spiritually elevating to my mind – in comparison with St Mary's Anglican Cathedral in Johannesburg with its Gothic vaults and delicate, distant altar, which I knew and loved. Here

the altar was remarkably plain and accessible, just a couple of steps up from the pews, within reach of them, with the counterpoint of a sturdy pulpit informing me that this was indeed a 'Protestant' church, where preaching would be central. Forebodings of finger-wagging dominees slipped uneasily into my mind...

The service started, with more words than I was accustomed to, but with reassuringly familiar ground notes. My eye was caught by sunlight flooding through the deep blues of the St Cecilia stained glass window above the organ, splashing wonderful colours onto the carpet in front of the altar – a shaft of exquisite beauty – while someone was reading a psalm, or saying a prayer. The light and the words sank into me, like an arrow that had found its target, and it felt as if, amazingly, beyond belief, God just then reached out with his finger to touch me, and said something like 'Yes, this is who I am, this is where you'll find me, and all is well!' What, in this strange church that I didn't even know, out of the blue like that? Well, yes, just so, the blue of the St Cecilia window laid a cornerstone for me that morning. Like a drink of water after a hot thirsty journey through a desert. Like arms holding and welcoming me home.

It could indeed have been just a flash in the pan, but that finger has continued to touch and reassure and challenge me over twenty years, through the people and leaders of this church who have taught me who Jesus is, what his love and grace and truth can mean, about praying and singing, rejoicing and grieving, and how as a human family under him we can do more than we ever thought possible and live with hope and courage in our troubled and questing land. And so the light from a stained glass window has come to symbolise for me over the years the light of Christ's presence in this particular group of people who make up Rondebosch United Church – not just the stone church over the bridge in Belmont Road anymore, but a precious and hallowed people's place, and a living, loving group of people, where you may quite often encounter God when you are least expecting it!

## WHAT RONDEBOSCH UNITED CHURCH HAS MEANT TO ME

JUDY SEWELL

*Judy Sewell was Director of the Lady Buxton Centre for 10 years and now works for the National Union of Educators. She is married to Bill Sewell, a Management Consultant who has been very active in civic affairs. They have two daughters, Caroline and Gail (Anders). Both Judy and Bill served as deacons in our church in the mid-1980s.*

When our family relocated to Cape Town in early 1984, we stayed for a month in the then Fairmead Hotel. During the first week I made enquiries about the whereabouts of nearby local churches

and decided that Rondebosch Congregational Church, being the closest to walk to, would be as good a place as any to start ‘trying out’!

I must admit I can't remember that first service, but during the following week we had an unexpected visit from Kay Gibson, and I guess that set the seal. A week later, she and her husband took me to St James's beach, while Caroline and Gail were at school. (Bill, my husband, was still in Johannesburg wrapping up business matters.) By the time Bill was able to join us, we were ‘RonCongers’, and it was not long before we became members of the church.

The church at Rondebosch United consists of people. Doug Bax will always be very special to me – he endured more than a year of me as a critical know-it-all while I was attending the Bible Institute in Kalk Bay and was always very gracious, patient and even encouraging while I was in full critical flood. The epitome of tolerance!

I recall with joy, the fruitful prayer evenings that a group of us attended at Daphne Wilson's home. We prayed so fervently for our country to be released from apartheid and for God's justice to prevail.

In 1996, after a stint of some years away from Ron Cong, when I worshipped for some time at Christ Church, Kenilworth, but later withdrew and barely survived in a spiritual desert, the call to return to (the now) Rondebosch United became strong, and I was granted my request to become a member again.

Over the years, the spiritual life of the church has become more and more uplifted, and I rejoice in being able to express this by raising my hands in joyful worship of our wonderful God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## GOD IS GOOD

SUELLEN SHAY

*Suellen is the daughter of missionary parents. She grew up in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and studied in the USA. She now works at the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at UCT. She is married to Don Shay, who is starting a business in international trade. Both Suellen and Don have served as deacons in our church and been active in the Sunday School. They have three daughters, Charissa, Danielle and Emily.*

Many people speak of the church as a ‘home’, and for us this has certainly been the case in a very real sense. It was the reputation of RonCong (as it was then known) as a community of faith engaged in the social and political issues of the day that brought us to South Africa in the first place, more than 13 years ago. Our home church in the United States, New Covenant Fellowship, had a vision to send people, not money, to develop relationships and be of service to churches in countries experiencing political strife. We arrived in Cape Town for the first time as newlyweds of 3 months with

little more than clothes and a few personal belongings. The generosity of many people provided us with accommodation, bedding, curtains, plates and cutlery. More importantly we were welcomed into a community of faith, a family.

The late 1980s were a tumultuous time in the country, and we were young, naïve Americans who wanted to be of service in some small way. Through the church community we were provided with places – a house church, Sunday evening services, Taizé services, support groups, camps -- in which to grow, to be challenged, to come to new and deeper understandings of who God might be. We were given opportunities to get involved and share our gifts. We came to South Africa as a couple, and now there are 7 of us (including our three children and my parents, Ron and Carolyn Butler).

God is good. It is with tremendous gratitude that we have participated in this ever-dynamic and growing community – a community that welcomes different styles of music, a community that can accommodate a wide variety of theologies, a community that welcomes young families, a community that is attracting a greater diversity of people from Rondebosch as well as brothers and sisters from other parts of Africa and the world. In the words of the blessing at the end of every family service we pray for us all: God be before us, Christ beside us, the Spirit within us, all three around us. Amen.

## WE HEARD THE CALL!

GEORGE N. MALEK

*For details about George Malek see page 31 under the section ‘Our Ministers Past and Present’.*

*‘Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you...so Abram went, as the Lord had told him...’ (Genesis 12:1,4a).*

The story began in America, from the secured enfoldment of a monastery in California. Longing to find rest, I preached with the ring of a prophet who spoke from within, a more secure domain, the closed chambers of a soul when the suffering in ministry can be only consoled by faith in the Cross of Christ our God. This is where my story begins to unfold with who the Rondebosch United Church is, our Church.

In those days I met Elmarie in America. She too was looking for God, beyond the oppressive system that had coined her ‘religion,’ apartheid in the form of a Church – and from which racism continues, albeit more submergent now behind clenched teeth, with spread lips to the side. Mistakenly, one may think it a smile. It was in this frame of matters that Elmarie and I met. She teaching medicine, I theology. Then we came to South Africa and met John de Gruchy. It was neither John’s fame nor his position that

drew us to him. It was his son Steve, who took us to meet John. Elmarie was taking a course in medicine with Marian at UCT then. ‘Your first sin,’ said Steve, ‘is that you don’t know who John de Gruchy is, and you call yourself a theologian!’ Little did Steve know how theologians had closed our hearts, sending us on to look for God.

Our first encounter with John at his office was a mark to last with us. It was *healing*. Unlike ‘theologians’, he embraced us in his arms. He sensed our ‘lostness’: I in a strange world in South Africa, Elmarie seeking the face and love of Jesus. We wept. We sensed the meaning of the land, home.

John guided us. Steve held our wedding service. It was all here in Rondebosch, a place of healing for us, from which I came to know that God had called us to South Africa.

My probationary year as a ministerial intern in South Africa was done here in our church: Douglas, with his theological astuteness trying to understand a free spirit! Lord have mercy!! Christ have mercy!! It all needed the heart of John, not only the mind of Douglas. God knew my two sides and they met at Rondebosch United.

Through it all we experienced what our church family is all about. When we had to move out of Observatory because of repeated house break-ins, it was Merry McClelland’s home that sheltered us. When we needed guidance, the church family was always there. The highlight of our experience was my ordination service, where an ecumenical spirit prevailed in our church, and so many denominations were represented. Then John’s sermon on the occasion of my ordination, ‘Deal tenderly, Lord, with thy servant.’ It was then that I knew that John loved us and knew my spirit from the beginning. Behind it all one sees in Rondebosch a United Church, in which a tender Christian heart reigns, not a ‘legal’ one. Through it all we led a Pope (of the Coptic Orthodox Church) to be the honoured guest of our church after we took members of our church family to be part of the delegation to the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. Our church was behind all that, and Sue and Reg Smith have been a silent backbone of our ministry of publication. It was through our church that Southern Africa linked with North Africa, and soon (God willing) it will be with the Vatican as well. It was all the fruit of having been loved. This is why Rondebosch is not only where I am an associate pastor, but where Elmarie and I name it ‘home.’

Not only did God promise Abraham a land, but also a son in his *old age*. Elmarie is expecting now, after seven long years on the journey to the promised land! She is not ninety yet, but I am close to one hundred, and at times have gone far beyond it!

My prayer for our church family is that the journey would not stop in South Africa, but that we would see a new heaven in an old earth whenever we come to church.

## FROM GERMANY BY COINCIDENCE

ROBERT STEINER

*For details about Robert Steiner see page 31 under the section ‘Ministers past and Present’.*

Six years ago Tina and I arrived from Germany to continue our studies, first at Stellenbosch and then at UCT in Cape Town. We were planning to stay for just a year, but when John de Gruchy kindly invited me to study for a doctorate and assist him in his post-graduate seminars we knew that we would spend a few more years in this exciting country.

Our connection with Rondebosch United Church began with a coincidence. I remember walking back home with my friend Juan Luis Garcés, who had also come out with me from Germany, on one of our first evenings in Rondebosch. We had just enjoyed a cup of coffee at Kuzmas, when we passed the church and saw that it was



Robert conducts one of his monthly family services where the children join the entire worship service.

open. We decided to come in and saw a group of about 25 young students worshipping together. The first to greet us very warmly were Merry Burman and then Douglas Bax. We felt welcome straight away and began to attend the service regularly. As Douglas and I started chatting, I found out that he had also studied for a while in Göttingen and spoke German very well. We quickly became good friends.

In the course of time both John and Douglas encouraged me to enter the ministry here in South Africa. Two years later I began my ministry as a probationer at the church and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister at the beginning of 1999.

It took me a while to figure out where I would be able to contribute to the life of the church. My ministry began mainly with the students and then included the supervision of the Sunday School. Later on, thanks to the inspiration of a visiting professor from the USA, Bill Everett, the family services became a monthly project. This offered a wonderful platform not only to bring together all ages in our congregation but also to experiment

with different forms of worship and liturgy, including elements from drama and the arts. Finally the youth ministry also began to take shape. It all began with a soccer ball on a Friday late afternoon. Slowly the attendance of these regular soccer practices grew, until we were able to form a team and challenge other church teams. Quickly the youth ministry became a ministry of reconciliation bridging the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged in our suburb. An after-school Homework Programme was put in place at which those young people who struggled with English and maths received regular help from members of our congregation. Generous sponsorships for those wanting to attend a Scripture Union Holiday Camp were made available. And finally our Saturday Night Youth Club was able to open its doors as a place to socialise, play games like pool or table soccer, or simply dance to good music.

I thank God for having had the chance to be part of these exciting developments and to be able to minister in a congregation ready to embrace the challenges of our particular time. Working in such a vibrant environment with colleagues like Douglas Bax, John de Gruchy and George Malek has been a tremendous privilege. But these ministries would have not been realized without the support of a committed church council, our dedicated music director Sybil Lessing, and our creative team of Sunday School teachers.

## LOOKING BACK ON OUR TIME WITH YOU AT RONDEBOSCH

ROB AND CELESTE HABIGER

*Rob Habiger (a PhD in physics) and Celeste came to Cape Town Africa from Bartelsville in the USA in 1998, when Rob's oil company put him in charge of an oil exploration project off the east coast of South Africa. They were members of our church from the beginning of 1999 to the end of 2000, when, with no oil found, the company closed the project and they returned to Bartelsville. They both served as deacons during 2000. Celeste was a champion long-distance runner and very active in work in townships like Guguletu.*

One of the attributes of Rondebosch United that we have cherished most is the wonderful diversity of the congregation. This diversity manifests itself in many ways. Certainly the mixture of races and cultural

backgrounds is one of the most obvious and uplifting. This is also the diversity that is most different from our previous, near homogeneous congregation in Oklahoma.

However, this Church's diversity by no means ends there. Although the location near to the Baxter Suites is what brought Rob to Rondebosch United the first time, the wonderful blend of theological pursuit and spirituality is what kept him coming back. This is also a type of diversity, and it continued to fulfil the spiritual needs of Celeste and the rest of the family when they arrived 6 months later. As God's children, we don't all approach his throne the same way, but this diversity allows us to find Him where we are. Some Sundays we get a healthy dose of theological history, other times an in-depth study on the liturgy of communion, and other times a strong emotional experience. But in all cases, we experience God through his Son Jesus Christ. After all, God can work through the mind and the heart.

The diversity in the worship service has also been special. Although our first love in church music is the organ, the addition of the marimbas has been wonderful and has added a whole new dimension to our spiritual experience. Likewise, the diversity exhibited between Robert's Family Service, with the attending and wonderful chaos, and one of Douglas's intellectual treatises is marvellous. Throw into the mix, John's academic, yet very spiritual influence and you have a recipe that is just right.

Finally, the very constitution of the Church stands for its diversity. As a member of two denominations, it can celebrate the strengths of each. Rondebosch doesn't try to be all things to all people, but it does commit itself to reaching its members and friends where they are.

Rondebosch United will always hold a special place in our hearts for other reasons. Our youngest son, Todd, made his commitment to Christ and the Church through confirmation into Rondebosch United. That will be a part of his spiritual history and ours as well. Also, the love and support shown to Rob while waiting for the family to arrive was so appreciated, especially during the time of Todd's eye accident when the congregation upheld Todd and the whole family with their concern and prayers.

We have been telling our Christian friends in the U.S. how much we have loved our Church home in Cape Town. Although we look forward to returning to friends and family in the U.S., the move will be bitter-sweet, considering what we must leave behind. Thank you for helping us along in this part of our Christian journey. And to all members and friends of Rondebosch United, our Christian sisters and brothers, we wish a blessed and joyful Centenary!



## BEGINNING FROM THE END

BARRY LESSING

*Barry Lessing graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Stellenbosch in 1959 and rose to be Deputy Managing Director of Transnet. In 1996 he retired and he now serves on the Church Council of the Rondebosch United Church. He is married to Sybil Lessing, and they have three children: Heloise (Bottomley), Gustav and Christo.*



Barry Lessing

When I read the history and reminiscences in this book many words come to mind such as *creativity, witness, suffering, action, growth, caring, vision and commitment*. It is clear that Rondebosch United Church is a vine that has been well planted and has borne much fruit. As its proud story shows, it has left indelible marks on the sad history of our country.

Here we are today then, celebrating 100 years of our existence. So what, if anything, should be different? With regard to another vine the Lord said, ‘Yes, it is planted, but will it live and grow?’<sup>25</sup> If we apply that question to ourselves, the answer to a large extent depends on us, the present members and custodians of God’s church. With a history such as ours, we may be tempted to ask, Why should we even consider this question? Have we not already proved our worth? But we need to heed the question because complacency with who we are and with what we are doing is a recipe for spiritual death. Yet how do we diagnose our own condition and so see where we need to amend? The best person to do that may be someone from outside our own company. At the same time we need to pray for the Lord to reveal where we fall short in our attitudes and actions. We need the insight of an outsider to see how our witness, our suffering, our actions, our attitudes, our growth and our creativity need to address the world today.

What outsiders are available for this? Rod Botsis was such an outsider when we met together with him for a weekend at *Volmoed*. His message about ‘becoming free in Christ’ is one that we should continue to wrestle with. Trevor Hudson will be another such outsider whom we need to listen to.

Trevor’s meetings with us have the enigmatic general title, ‘Beginning from the end.’ Chosen by the Centenary Committee, this title has left many people puzzled. What does it mean? How can we get a grip on it? To my mind it is no less than a wake-up call for the new millennium! It challenges us to think about where we as the custodians of God’s church are taking it. Now is the time, as Douglas says in his preface, to catch or shape a vision for our future. This vision is part of the ‘end’ we are talking about. It is a vision that must be shaped in the light of God’s promised Kingdom that will come at the end of all human history. That is the supreme end in the light of which all our thinking and planning must begin, because that is the basis of our hope in a world that has so much to make it despair. In his book *Wild Hope*<sup>26</sup> Tom Sine writes that, in facing up to the challenges of the future, contemporary churches worldwide must struggle to address three crises facing them:

- a crisis of anticipation,
- a crisis of vision, and
- a crisis of creativity.

His research shows that contemporary churches fail to take the trouble to anticipate events or trends that impact on them. The result is that they never have any vision for the future and react only with damage control when there is no more time to think and the options are limited. Therefore, Sine says, churches are not able to say things such as ‘We want to go to the top of Mount Everest’, because the question of a destination never arises with them. Contemporary churches merely ‘travel the way’ because there is nothing more urgent to do. You cannot get to the top of Mount Everest if you don’t know that you want

<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel 17:9 – *Good News for Modern Man*

<sup>26</sup> Tom Sine, *Wild Hope – Crises facing the Human Community on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, [World Publishing](#)

to do it; you would not even know how to plan the journey, or what to take along and what to leave behind.

Doing the same thing over and over again, Sine says, smother initiative and creativity. Traditions are important things, as we all know, but we need to discern between traditions of substance and traditions of form. Are we not a Reformed church? Perhaps. But are we also a *Reforming* church?

As we seek to face the future with a clearer vision, as a Reforming church, let us remember three things:

**We should  
start with  
prayer**

Prayer should precede everything we do. We should all shoulder the responsibility of praying diligently for ourselves, our church and its members, and for wisdom to see where God wants to take us.

**Then we  
should  
think**

We need to anticipate the needs, challenges and opportunities that tomorrow's world will thrust on us, taking the trouble to become aware of issues and events that could have important consequences for us. We need to anticipate the consequences of such issues or events before they happen, so that, with God's help, we can shape them creatively, rather than merely be shaped by them. Such anticipation would lay the foundation for real vision. The Holy Spirit can use it to give substance to the vapour of dreams.

**Then we  
should  
act**

We need to 'work out our own salvation'. We need to pack our suitcases with the right things for the journey and to take the boat out of the safe waters of the harbour into the rough sea beyond the breakwater.



Prayer Precedes: a small group meets regularly on Saturday mornings to pray for our church.