

It's goodbye from him...



In July 2007 Andrew Marfleet stepped down after six years as Chair of ACT. He reflects on the many happy years he has been involved with the Association.

Early retirement

Seeing a picture of my daughter, now a teacher herself, in the last edition of *ACT Now* was confirmation enough that I can now take a back seat. I can retire properly, albeit a few years early as a result of the heart attack I had in October 2006. I was disappointed not to be able to take the chair at what would have been my final ACT Day last autumn, but am grateful for the good recovery I have made so far.

Retirement is allowing me to be more involved in my local church – as an elder and lay preacher – and in other activities nearer home. I'm discovering the joys of walking, cycling, swimming and hitting golf balls. And I live in a part of Suffolk where bird-watching is a real treat. My wife, Debby, had already decided to retire early from the classroom, so we are both able to enjoy a new lifestyle, especially now we are grandparents.

A remarkable work of God

I was an overseas teacher when the Association of Christian Teachers started. I had joined the Christian Education Fellowship on graduating from Cambridge in 1969, and had begun receiving *Spectrum*, the journal that served Christian teachers. ACT, which incorporated CEF, began in 1971 whilst I was training as a teacher in Uganda, and then spending a further two years in a Kenyan secondary school.

Life was good in Africa, and I felt I was making a contribution. I was reluctant to come home, but my mother had unexpectedly died – at the age of 45 – while I was there, and I felt the need to be

back with my father. So in 1972 I accepted a post in an upper school in Kent, near the family home, not knowing that the way was being prepared for me.

Just before I arrived, a remarkable work of God had begun in the school, and a group of pupils were now meeting together for prayer and fellowship. They were not surprised to see me: 'Oh, you must be the Christian teacher we prayed would arrive', I was told. Other Christian teachers joined the school or came out of the woodwork, and we eventually set up a teachers' prayer group there. Many of those Christian pupils were quite special. Some went overseas with Christian agencies, four or five became clergy, and others became teachers. We still get Christmas cards from several of them. I say 'we' advisedly, as I was introduced to my wife by one of them, the head boy at the time.

Getting involved

By 1977, I felt it was time to move on. Debby had left teaching that year when we began a family, and so we had flexibility. I actually applied for a post with ACT, who wanted a Development Officer, and was interviewed for this, only to learn that a certain Richard Wilkins had been offered the job. However David Blair of SU, who was ACT's executive secretary at this time, was determined not to let me escape. I was eventually persuaded to join the editorial board of *Spectrum* – the precursor of the *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*. By this time, I had accepted a teaching post in Grantham, but this proved to be no bar to serving on the board. The editor, Charles Martin, also worked in the East Midlands. So, from 1978 onwards, I began nearly 30 years of work on ACT committees.

*'Oh, you must be the Christian teacher
we prayed would arrive'*

We need not, as Christians, abandon state education

I was also involved in ACT conferences – at Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln; in Durham; and at The Hayes, Swanwick. The latter conferences were actually those of the UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) graduates, but sessions were devoted to different professional groups, and ACT actually used these for their annual meetings. More teachers were at these conferences than at other events the Association put on, so it made sense. I can remember the Swanwick conference when Charles Martin sold his vision of an educational study centre to assembled ACT members, and organised a visit to a redundant Methodist chapel in Stapleford for us all. The rest, as they say, is history.

God provides

The UCCF graduate conferences renewed my contact with Dr Oliver Barclay, whom I'd met as a student. He was on the look out for potential research scholars, and eventually persuaded me to embark on an MEd course at Nottingham University, under a scheme which eventually became the Whitefield Institute. I was provided with funds, as well as a Christian supervisor, but it was a real struggle financially to provide for myself, a wife and now two children on a student grant, however generous. But we learned that God provides, and even the soaring interest rates that inflated our mortgage in the early Thatcher years proved no obstacle. I completed the degree before accepting another teaching post – this time as Head of English at Felixstowe College, where it transpired the headteacher was a member of what was to become ACT's Board of Directors (then known as the General Committee).

We settled into life at Felixstowe, and Debby eventually returned to teaching – once our third child was old enough to entrust to carers. I had continued my involvement with SU by helping to lead Easter courses for sixth formers, on the arts and (later) on English literature. These courses, which ended up being held at Stapleford, taught me a lot about integrating faith and academic study. It's sad that they didn't continue, but I believe many Christian youngsters benefited from them. Some of us who led them became the first writers on the Charis Project, where ideas and methods we had trialled were used to good effect. My involvement with *Spectrum* increased, and I became editor in 1983. Richard Wilkins had edited

it himself for a short time after Charles Martin had become ACT Chair, but the task was a large one, particularly since Richard had launched *ACT Now* (originally *ACT News*) as a house journal.

Becoming editor meant that I was to become *ex officio* a member of the ACT Board of Directors. My first stint was for seven years, but handing over to John Shortt seemed to coincide with my being elected to the Board in my own right, and (with two short gaps) I have served as an ACT Director ever since.

Transition

I had responsibility for *Spectrum* at a transitional time: it ceased to be a compulsory purchase for ACT members, who now had another magazine. *Spectrum* changed to an A5 format, became more academic and was, in a very real sense, an outlet for the increasing amount of serious research into education that was being done by Christians. Several ACT members began PhD studies – including Fred Hughes, John Shortt, Trevor Cooling and William Kay – and it was good to be able to publish some of their work, and a few efforts of my own, too. Another response to the academic side of ACT was the start of the Theory of Education conferences at Stapleford House. With sponsorship from the Whitefield Institute, these became ACT's most well-attended weekend conferences, outgrowing Stapleford House and still running now, long after Stapleford's other weekend courses ceased. The credibility and reputation of



Kisii School, where Andrew taught in Kenya 1970-72





Andrew at the start of his teaching career (1969)

ACT and Stapleford were, I believe, greatly enhanced by the fact that we now had several people engaged at the cutting edge of educational thinking.

Values Education

ACT had close connections with CARE at this time – the same people (such as Simon Marsh, George Oliver, Alison Farnell) seemed to appear on committees and we led joint seminars at Spring Harvest. It even took some of us overseas: Brian Wakeman and I had a fascinating visit to Bratislava in 1993, to advise on their new Ethics Development Initiative, a Slovak PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) programme. I visited Slovakia again the following year, to see how the programme was faring, linked with a trip to Hungary to forge closer links with Christian teachers there. I also began attending conferences organised by the European Educators' Christian Association (EurECA) in various European countries, and learnt how differently Christian values are applied in other parts of the continent.

Along with other Christians involved in education I found myself part of the public debate on values that raged in the mid 1990s. Some of us were enlisted as members of the Forum on Values Education that Nick Tate of the School Curriculum

It has been a privilege to serve you all – many thanks, ACT, and may God bless you all richly

and Assessment Authority (SCAA, later the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, QCA) initiated. It is interesting to see how part of our input is reflected in the introduction and appendices of *Curriculum 2000*.

Inspection and consultancy

Following completion of my doctoral thesis on Christian values in school I became a full-time university academic, doing educational research first for the University of East Anglia and then Cambridge University. Along the way, I trained as an Ofsted inspector. An educational trust had paid for me to do this – as long as I agreed to inspect RE – and I was pleasantly surprised to pass the training. Inspection work began to trickle in, as contractors became aware of my existence, although it took a few years for me to earn a reasonable income from inspection and consultancy.

Amongst other things I worked part-time for the Evangelical Literature Trust, a Christian charity which specialised in sending theological books to two-thirds world countries. I enjoyed the four years I spent with them, helping to develop the work started by John Stott. I was even able to link the work with that of ACT's Overseas Fund, and provide cheap Bible commentaries for RE teachers in Zimbabwe. I have always been enthusiastic about ACT's Overseas Fund. I had started as an overseas teacher in East Africa, and in more recent years had learned much about education in Europe.

2001–2007

I took over as Chair of ACT in 2001, having been Vice Chair whilst Anthea Tulloch-Bisgrove was Chair. I had stepped down as Director of the Evangelical Literature Trust, and (initially) had more time on my hands. Rupert Kaye became Vice Chair, but he was soon to replace Richard as CEO. I never expected to remain ACT Chair for six years, especially as my work as an inspector grew to become full-time, but I came to appreciate that my long experience in the Association was a real asset at this point in ACT's history.

I made it a priority to maintain good relationships with other organisations. I was already a Trustee of the Stapleford Centre, and I helped set up their *Faith in Education* courses. Membership of the Values Education Council and the RE Council

There is much that remains to be done, but God has His servants out there in our schools

increases our spheres of influence. It would be all too easy for ACT to lose the strong links it had with UCCF and SU, but joint events and programmes have not allowed this to happen, I'm glad to say. The annual teachers' conferences held jointly with Stapleford, SU and TISCA (and, originally, CARE) have fulfilled a vital function, as have the ongoing headteachers' conferences.

ACT remains a stakeholder in the production of the *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* and our links with EurECA seem stronger than ever. Our links with the other ACTs in the UK have been strengthened, too, not to mention links with similar organisations around the world. In 2005, it was a privilege for me to represent ACT in India, continuing links with the Evangelical Teachers' Fellowship made on previous visits by Trevor Cooling and Richard Wilkins.

Signing off

There have been many changes in recent years on the ACT Board, but I have enjoyed working with all the Directors who have served the Association, as well as with Rupert. It has certainly demonstrated to me what a rich experi-

ence of education we have in ACT. I like to think that as an inspector I have probably seen inside more classrooms than many in the Association, and have had the privilege of meeting and encouraging a good number of Christian teachers.

I've been impressed by the teachers I've met, and have been thrilled to discover excellent support in many schools from Christian governors, parents and schools workers. There is much that remains to be done, but God has His servants out there in our schools. We need not, as Christians, abandon state education. As I pass on the baton, I trust that Arthur Jones, my successor, will have as much support and encouragement as I have had. It has been a privilege to serve you all – many thanks, ACT, and may God bless you all richly.

■ Andrew Marfleet

I trust that Arthur Jones, my successor, will have as much support and encouragement as I have had

NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: *Replenishing Reservoirs of Hope*

Engaging the iPod generation
Challenges for schools in a digital age

Thursday 7 – Saturday 9 February 2008
Coton House, Rugby, Warwickshire

SPEAKERS

Joel Edwards General Director of the Evangelical Alliance (tbc)

Baroness Morris of Yardley (Estelle Morris)
Former Secretary of State for Education and President of the National Children's Bureau

David Moore HMI: Behaviour, discipline and exclusions

Other speakers include:

Alan Flintham Consultant Headteacher, NCSL, author of 'Reservoirs of Hope'

Jenny Baker and Simon Shutt workshops on understanding young people today

For more information and a booking form please visit www.stapleford-centre.org and follow the link for Conferences, or telephone **0115 939 6270**

Supported by the Association of Christian Teachers, The Stapleford Centre and The Independent Schools Christian Alliance.

