



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

“What hath God wrought!” — 25 years of Christian education in Kilskeery



2004 school photo of staff and pupils.

Christian Education is no innovation. Rather, it is a return to a system of education based upon the Word of God and church-linked. It was in just such a school that the Saviour would most likely have received His education as a boy, since it had long been the custom amongst the Jews to educate their children in a synagogue school. In 1978, the Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church gave permission for the establishing of

independent Christian schools under the supervision of the Presbytery Education Board. The first school opened its doors on September 5th, 1979. That was in Kilskeery in Co. Tyrone. The minister there was Rev. Ivan Foster. He and his wife, Ann, a high school teacher at that time, had children approaching the age for secondary education. Because of their concerns about the state system, they decided to educate the children at home. This decision aroused interest within the congregation for the formation of a Christian school. An extension to the church building was completed in time for the start of the school year in 1979. The principal was Mrs. Foster.

The curriculum of the new school was Bible-based with a strong emphasis on the teaching of the Word of God. Topics such as evolution would be examined and shown to be false. Modern literature, with its predilection for obscenities, immorality and situation ethics would be rejected and the classics of English literature used instead. The teaching methods employed would be based upon those employed of God. He repeats the same basic truth from Genesis to Revelation, but progressively enlarges upon the degree of knowledge imparted. The school started as a primary school with thirteen pupils. In its second year, it added first form secondary school and each subsequent year another form was added. no assistance Free Presbyterian schools receive no assistance whatsoever from the Department of Education. Building costs, the supply of books and stationery and the wages of teachers must all be undertaken by the local school management committee. Access to school transport is refused to pupils travelling to our schools.

The finances needed have to be raised by the congregations operating the school. Fees are charged but these fall far short of covering all the expenses. Pupils sitting GCSE and GCE examinations have to pay the substantial entry fees. Friends of our schools contribute gifts and offerings. But, by far, the chief contribution in the operating of our schools comes from the sacrifice of dedicated teachers, who give their services and skills for a remuneration far



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below that which they would receive, were they employed in the state schools. To them, their employment is a service for children which they perform for the Lord.

Spread

The interest in Christian education spread to other Free Presbyterian congregations. Ballymoney and Newtownabbey opened schools in 1983. Bangor followed in 1985. Bethany congregation in Portadown and Mourne congregation in Kilkeel opened their schools in 1988. In 1989 Clogher Valley opened its school. In 1988, the Education Board launched its own teacher training scheme. It is a system of classroom-based practical instruction linked to an extern university degree course. At the end of four years, with substantial experience in the classroom and a degree, the trainee graduates and is appointed as a probationary teacher for a further two years.

The record of academic achievements by our schools — our GCSE and 'A'-level examination results are well above the national average for non-streamed schools and usually on par with Grammar school results — has served to silence any critics.

Special service

On Saturday, June 19th at 3.30 pm, a special service will take place in Kilskeery to mark the 25th anniversary of the commencement of Christian education in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church and to record our gratitude to Almighty God for the unfailing provision enjoyed over the last quarter of a century.

“ . . . according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!”

Numbers 23:23.

Further information on Christian Education may be had from:— The Presbytery Education Board, 51 Old Junction Road, Kilskeery, Co. Tyrone, BT78 3RN.