

WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Ana Gobledale

**‘You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your
soul, and with all your mind.’**

**This is the greatest and first
commandment. And a second
is like it:**

**‘You shall love your neighbor as
yourself.’**

— **Matthew 22:37-39***

*Merrill Kitchen’s favourite Bible passage.

Working with someone you admire is indeed a pleasure. For me, working with Merrill Kitchen, Principal of Churches of Christ Theological College (CCTC) in Melbourne, Australia, these past 4 ½ years has been both an honor and a pleasure. An inspiration to colleagues and students, Merrill brings to her position a dynamic faith and a wisdom grounded in experience, scholarship and reflection. As a woman involved in international mission, she brings an exciting commitment to multi-cultural and multi-faith societies.

MERRILL KITCHEN: AN AUSTRALIAN CHILDHOOD (WITH ALL YOUR HEART)

Ana: Where are you from, and what is your family background?

Merrill: *I was born in Melbourne. My mother’s father, Jack Lazarus, came from a Jewish family of early settlers in Australia. My grandmother, Carrie, was a Methodist. My father’s father, Arnold Wilson, was born in England. We have been unable to find a reliable genealogy of his wife, Elsie, who probably came from a local Aboriginal family. The Wilson family were nominal Presbyterians, but my grandmother used to tell us never trust anyone who says “Amen.”*



Merrill Kitchen

Ana: What experiences as a child influenced and helped to lead you to your commitment to the church and to mission?

Merrill: *Memories of childhood flood back every time I walk around East Melbourne. It is a holy place for me, a place where the transcendent mixes with ordinariness: the St. Peter’s crucifix, kicking great mounds of autumn leaves, stories told by Salvation Army personnel on the steps of their printing office, the picture of Jesus at the Baptist Sunday School, and the sanctuary at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.*

MEDICAL MISSION IN NAZARETH (WITH ALL YOUR SOUL)

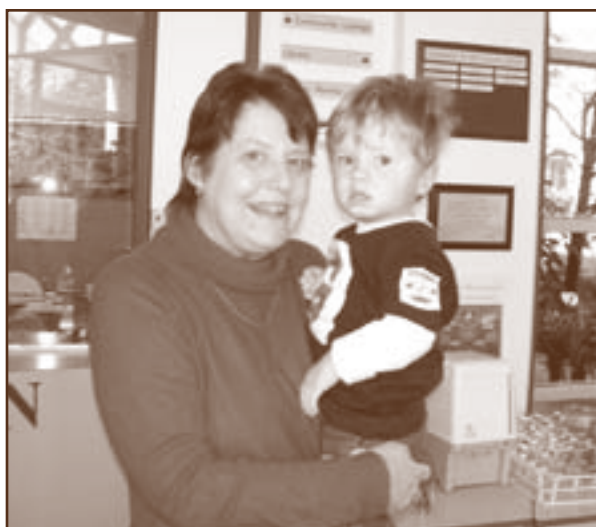
Initially Merrill trained as a Medical Scientist and worked in pathology departments at both the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women’s Hospital. She accompanied her husband, Paul, when he was given the opportunity for postgraduate surgical training in the United Kingdom. While



Merrill Kitchen and mission statement of CCTC.



Merrill Kitchen serving as President of the Melbourne College of Divinity.



Merrill Kitchen with her grandson.

there, the young medical couple “were challenged by the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society to help their hospital in Nazareth, Israel, during a period of conflict when they did not have enough medical personnel to assist the hospital in meeting the needs of its constituents, the Arabic speaking people of the Galilee region. We expected to be there for about 6 months and stayed for 6 years.”

At the Nazareth Hospital, Merrill taught nursing students in English and “facilitated a biblical studies program for nurses and other women in the community” in Arabic. She and Paul also worked at the Southern Baptist hospital in Gaza (now known as the Ahli Arab Hospital run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem). “The most rewarding aspects of [my] time in Israel/Palestine was the mutually nurturing relationships developed with colleagues

from all three Abrahamic religious communities. The most challenging aspects were the times spent helping other short-term ex-pats cope with living in this environment, particularly during times of war and conflict.” After they returned to Australia, Paul continued to provide furlough and sabbatical relief for surgeons in both Nazareth and Gaza. Since 1989, Paul and Merrill have led 10 work/study groups to Nazareth Hospital, the Nazareth Village project (an archaeological reconstruction site), and the Mar Elias Educational Institutions in Ibillin, Northern Galilee.

Merrill: *One of the most profound experiences I had was sitting at the bedside of a Nazareth colleague who was dying of leukemia. She had been orphaned during the conflicts in the late 1940's/early 1950's in Israel and brought up in a Christian orphanage in Nazareth. She trained as a nurse at the hospital, married a local Christian and had two children who were school friends of my own children. Several missionaries had pledged to sit with her during the last days of her illness, and during one of my turns at sitting I kept falling asleep. The Muslim nursing sister in charge of the ward urged me to go home and get some sleep saying that just because I wasn't there didn't mean that God was not present with her! I realized that, in fact, I arrogantly assumed that our Christian presence was the only way in which God could be present with her!*

Merrill: *The reality is that wherever other people's values and pain are encountered so the fragile self is revealed. The truth of this in a same-culture environment*



Students at CCTC.

is magnified greatly in the cross-cultural situation. A myriad of hitherto silenced (or suppressed) presuppositions are fleshed out in the process of seeing oneself as 'other'. One is faced with the weakness and even lies of the home church and preparing agencies – encountering spirituality in other human traditions.

EDUCATIONAL MISSION IN AUSTRALIA (WITH ALL YOUR MIND)

Churches of Christ in Australia recently announced their focus on leadership, particularly the development of effective church leaders. For some this means training growers of mega-churches. For others it means jumping on board the “emerging church” bandwagon. For others it means gathering hordes of youth to sing songs of praise. For Merrill Kitchen, it means entering into a dialogue with folk who are questioning and searching. It means confronting closed minds, and inviting people to open their minds to the mysteries and ambiguities of the Christian faith. Serving as Principal of Churches of Christ Theological College and Lecturer in New Testament Studies gives Merrill ample opportunity to engage in theological reflection, both solitary and in community

Merrill: *The starting point for my theological reflection... is a faith understanding that the creator God (as Parent, Person and Spirit) is intimately present in all life and all human experience. Furthermore that God has been graciously communicated to us all in the person of, and through the faith of, Jesus Christ... The most valuable*



Ana & Tod Gobledale served as Chaplains at CCTC 2003-2007.

spiritual discipline [for me] is the conscious setting aside of regular uninterrupted reflective space.

Merrill feels that two factors in her life have been most valuable in helping her reflect theologically: first, her “encounter with faithful people in the struggle to engage with the AIDS epidemic” and second, her “deeply committed, joyful, encouraging, sharing family environment in which mutuality and interdependence is experienced as we encounter Christ together in the adventure of faith.” She has found valuable assistance also in the writings of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, John V. Taylor, Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann.

Ana: What is the most challenging aspect of your work as Principal at CCTC ?

Merrill: *Juggling work, family, wider church issues, and mission projects so that all are positive experiences for everyone involved.*

Ana: What is the most rewarding part of your work?

Merrill: *Journeying alongside others in a mutual journey of faith where we learn from each other and discover God's presence amongst us in many unexpected ways.*

Merrill has profoundly touched the lives of hundreds of students at CCTC. Her ability to blend a commitment to both international mission and tasks near at hand provides an impressive example

of a life balanced in its response to God's call. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to work with her and learn from her.



Ana Gobledale has served our church through Global Ministries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the USA and most recently in Australia where she and her husband, Tod, were chaplains and lecturers at Churches of Christ Theological College 2003-2007. They are currently seeking a settled pastorate in the USA.

REFLECTION QUESTION

1. What religious symbols and places influenced you as a child?
2. Who has been an inspiration of faith and wisdom for you?
3. What cross-cultural situations have you been in? What did you learn from them?
4. What faith stances would you include in "the starting point" for your personal theological reflection?
5. What are you trying to juggle in your life?

PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES

- Medical missionaries
- The people living in Nazareth and Gaza today
- Merrill Kitchen and others who lead theological seminaries
- The staff and students at Churches of Christ Theological College, Australia

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A Winning Combo: Women and the Environment!

Join the national UCC staff by participating in a cell phone recycling program which will help the environment and provide resources through the Women's Funding Network (WFN) to end poverty among women.

The Good Deed Foundation, a part of the WFN, has started a cell phone recycling program nationally which will benefit women. Here's how:

- Cell phones which can be converted into 911 emergency phones will go to women facing threats of violence
- Cell phones which cannot be converted will be sent for total recycling of materials – taken apart and those materials which can be reused will be sold and used in new products
- 66% of the money raised from recycling (each cell phone is worth from \$0-\$8.00) will then be given to the Women's Funding Network Dismantling Poverty Network

The Good Deed Foundation will send boxes for individuals or groups post-paid upon request. Simply go to their site and sign up (www.gooddeedfoundation.org). For more on the Women's Funding Network, visit www.wfn.org.



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