

# A Brief History of the Church in New Zealand

In the beginning ...

For a description of the founding of the Worldwide Church of God, its theological roots and its early history before coming to New Zealand, [click here](#).

## The Beginnings in New Zealand

The first evangelistic effort by the Worldwide Church of God into New Zealand came in the form of Readers Digest advertisements and a short wave radio broadcast out of Sydney, Australia in 1957. Although radio reception was often poor, it drew requests for the literature advertised from many parts of the country. The Plain Truth, then the flagship magazine of the church, had been published in the USA since 1934 and was at that time being produced at the church's headquarters in Pasadena, California. The first New Zealand members of the church were baptised in 1958 but it wasn't till 1962 that ministers of the church were sent from Australia to visit the small but growing number of interested readers. In the course of that first tour a group of 18 were baptised, with more being added in two subsequent visiting tours (1964 and 1966).

In 1967 the first minister (Graemme Marshall) was posted to New Zealand, which was a great encouragement. With the greatly improved service to the members here, a number of small groups sprang up. The initial meeting of the church in New Zealand was a Bible study in the evening of September 7 of that year, drawing 33 people. The first church service at which Wayne Cole, the Regional Director based in Sydney, spoke was held in Auckland on 28 October, immediately following that year's Feast of Tabernacles (regionally held then in Blackheath, NSW, Australia). The first Festival in New Zealand was held in Taupo in 1969 with an attendance of 333.

## Congregations and Office

Expansion in those years was rapid with congregations opening in Wellington (1971), Hamilton (1972), Nelson (1973), Christchurch (1974), Dunedin (1974), Tauranga (1974), Palmerston North (1975), Whangarei (1975), New Plymouth (1976), Hawkes Bay (1979), Invercargill (1979) and Rotorua (1981).

With the church growing significantly from the outset both in New Zealand and the South Pacific, a regional office was opened in Auckland with New Zealand's first minister as Regional Director. He was joined by a small team of staff gleaned from the Sydney office to get things started to which were added graduates from the church's Bricket Wood campus of Ambassador College. Graemme Marshall was followed by Bob Morton (1975-1980), Peter Nathan (1980-1988) and Raymond McNair (1988-1993), when the New Zealand region was re-joined with the Australian region under Rod Matthews (1993-2002) but with an office retained in Auckland. In 2002 the church

in New Zealand, which had from the outset been legally an extension of the headquarters church in Pasadena, CA, USA, was restructured under a governing Trust Board.

In the early days of the church in New Zealand a proportionally substantial number of young Kiwis went to Ambassador College from this country. Many of these young men and women returned to take up a variety of roles in the ministry of the church here. The earliest students went in 1963 and the last (when the college closed) in 1996.

By WCG, New Zealand