

Ecumenical Board of Theological Studies

Annual Report - 2010-11

**Presented to the Annual General Meeting
and read at the Annual Graduation Ceremony on 29 April 2011**

On behalf of the Ecumenical Board of Theological Studies and its teaching arm, the Ecumenical Institute of Distance Theological Studies, I present this annual report.

Strategic Positioning

Last year I reported that the board had engaged Dewe Goode Associates to help with strategic positioning, branding and advertising.

From their survey of staff and students, it emerged that despite our full title being something of a mouthful, there was good 'brand recognition' around the acronym EIDTS and that we should keep it. This we have done.

But in order to emphasise what we do and how we do it, we have adopted the by-line *Theology by Correspondence*. One benefit has been to give us a much higher 'hit rate' when people search the internet for places where they can study theology. Previously we weren't even figuring in the possibilities. Our advertising and website have also had makeovers, giving us a fresher, more contemporary look.

While our student cohort has remained roughly the same in terms of theological outlook, preferred study method and age, we were interested to note that younger people with similar characteristics were also attracted to study with EIDTS.

All this has helped us to affirm EIDTS' identity and keep on doing what we do well.

Tertiary Education Developments

Last year I noted that tertiary education in New Zealand is an ever-changing landscape. For EIDTS the key concern has become the decision to make part of student funding dependent on award completions. This works well for institutions where students are full-time. It is much more problematic for those with part-time students.

EIDTS can easily show successful study completion by most of our students year after year. But when working at often one or two courses per year, it takes a student quite some time to complete the L.Th. That doesn't fit easily into TECs nice little box that rates the L.Th. as three years full-time study.

NZQA is also seeking to rationalise the number of qualifications awarded sector by sector. Theological qualifications are not exempt from this policy and in 2011 the board will be giving close attention to the effect of this policy on EIDTS.

Director

Our director, the Very Reverend Bruce Hansen tendered his resignation in November and will complete his term of service in May 2011. EIDTS has benefitted greatly from the professional manner in which Bruce has carried out his duties. Of particular note have been his clear understanding of EIDTS' place and value, his wide range of contacts in ecumenical and tertiary educational settings, his undoubted people skills and his personal integrity. We thank Bruce for all he has contributed to EIDTS over the past ten years and wish him well in his 'new' retirement.

This year the board has conducted a selection process for a new director with Linda Cowan of Christchurch being the successful applicant. Linda comes from an educational/teaching background including 13 years as principal of Waitaki Girls' High School, Oamaru. She has also been an adult distance theological student so has first-hand experience of the challenges facing many of our students as they seek to add study into their already busy lives. We warmly welcome Linda to EIDTS and look forward to working with her in the days ahead. Linda starts on 16 May with a two week overlap before Bruce finishes.

Academic Committee Chairperson

The Reverend Dr Geoffrey Haworth tendered his resignation as academic committee chairperson in December last year. His expanded duties at Kaiapoi following September's earthquake contributed to this decision. Geoff often delivered his opening devotions with wry humour and always guided the committee's meetings cheerfully and impartially. We thank Geoff for serving in this role since 2007. The Reverend Dr Ken Booth will act as interim chair until a new appointment is made.

Conclusion

In the midst of these large issues, the work of EIDTS continues as usual. Students enrol, study and pass their courses, tutors offer guidance and support, finances are carefully monitored, the academic committee and board meet regularly and attend to their respective responsibilities while the director oversees the day-to-day operations and our registrar continues to serve our students above and beyond the call of duty. This generally unseen but necessary work is what happens as EIDTS seeks to fulfil its mandate of providing quality distance theological education that is accessible, affordable and consistent with and supportive of the Christian ethos, traditions and policies of member denominations.

We thank all who continue to support us in this calling done in God's name and for his glory.

Kingsley D Sampson
Chairperson
Ecumenical Board of Theological Studies
April 2011