

Annual Report of The Theosophical Society in New Zealand Inc.

1 October 2004 to 30 September 2005

National Convention was held at Waikato University in January 2005 with guest speaker Betty Bland, the National President of the US Section. The Convention explored the theme of 'Ancient Wisdom in a Modern World' which led the delegates to spend some time exploring how we can make theosophy practical in today's world.

Murray Stentiford and Gavin Laurie both gave public talks at the convention and many members, both new and old, were given the opportunity to share their explorations of the convention theme through discussion, workshops and presentations of various types. Betty Bland gave a workshop entitled 'Keys and Gates' which explored some of the concepts from the Voice of the Silence. She also gave us a presentation on how the USA are using the Internet to promote the work of the Theosophical Society in America.

Practical Theosophy

H. P. Blavatsky once wrote

"Theosophy must not represent merely a collection of moral verities, a bundle of metaphysical Ethics epitomized in theoretical dissertations. Theosophy must be made practical, and has, therefore, to be disencumbered of useless discussion.... It has to find objective expression in an all-embracing code of life thoroughly impregnated with its spirit, the spirit of mutual tolerance, charity and love."¹

The delegates at the Convention spent a great deal of time during the five days of the convention and the two days National Council meeting before Convention, discussing what was meant by "practical theosophy" and looked at ways we could enliven theosophy in our Branches, creating exactly the emphasis suggested in the quote above. This resulted in many suggestions for changing the way we look at our branch meetings, working in larger groups and regions when we put together programmes, make much more use of themes to highlight essential aspects of theosophy and to bring a definite emphasis on the service side of our work in the Theosophical Society by encouraging members in our branches to pick up and work with service in our communities and thereby putting our ideals into practice on a practical level.

This followed several months of discussion, suggestions, guidance and promotion of these ideas by the National President with the intention to help the branch presidents to initiate some of these ideas in their branches around the country. This has met with some success but we still have a long way to go if we are really genuine about making theosophy practical and relevant today. Each branch decides for themselves what they wish to do however, and in the end it is up to them with regard to the direction they choose to take.

The members endorsed the development of a programme/study course on the 'Life and Death' process which is available for branches to use. It is currently under further development. Branches were encouraged to consider developing their own theosophical programmes with a practical component to them to share with other branches.

Regional Groups also came to fruition during the Hamilton Convention although they have been discussed for some years now. The Country has divided its lodges and study centres into three areas. One in the Northern Region which comprises lodges from Hamilton and Tauranga north. A Central Region which comprises those from New Plymouth and Napier down to Nelson. And a Southern Region which covers the rest of the South Island. The Central Region has proved successful with a meeting early in the year where they arranged to co-ordinate some programme sharing and speaker sharing amongst themselves. They also held a retreat weekend in Palmerston North with Vic Hoa Chin Jr as the special guest. The success of the central region is partly due to the work of Janine Sullenberger who was appointed the regions co-ordinator. She has been able to keep the branches focused and coordinate meetings and events.

The success of the work of the Regional Groups is important in the concept of sharing and supporting the work that is done by the branches. It also involves more of the branch members in the work of the Theosophical Society, which is another outlet for service in the work that we do.

1 The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society, H.P Blavatsky 1974 edition, page 4.

International Speakers. We have been fortunate to have had several quality speakers traveling in New Zealand this year. They were Dorothy Bell, from Australia who spoke at all branches and study groups, Dianne Kynaston, also from Australia, who visited several branches in the North Island and Vic Hao Chin Jnr., from the Philippines, who visited several branches in New Zealand and ran a seminar in Palmerston North which was well attended by surrounding branches.

National Meeting Facilitators. This year we have had a reduced number of members who facilitated meetings at branches and Study Groups. They were Aelred Edmunds, Aroon Parshotam, Allan Morse, John Vorstermans, Hugh Dixon, Gavin Laurie, Helen & Bryan Pollock, Warwick Keys, Erika Bianca, Murray Stentiford and Valerie White. They gave a range of presentations which included the following:

Developing the Intuition	Theosophy as synthesis of Science, Philosophy & Wisdom
Karma & Astrology	Universal Consciousness – an exploration of consciousness.
Dharma: the basis of human morals and ethics	Sufism: Islamic Mysticism
Illusion – known in the east as maya	The Way of Knowledge – Jnana Yoga
What are Our True Psychic Abilities	Understanding relationships in our lives
Wisdom Teachings Found in the Pyramids & Temples of Egypt	The way of Self-Knowledge – From inner to outer transformation.
Journey into the world of illusion.	White Madonnas and Black Madonnas.
What did we do in our previous lives?	Practical Hermeticism
Natures Beings	Walking the Talk – Applied Theosophy.
Symbolic Language – communication from higher to lower.	The Age of Aquarius and the legacy of Pisces and Aries.
Therapeutic Touch	Karma in Families.
The Theosophical World View.	Ayurveda
Meditation as a practice of well-being	Polishing the mirror of the mind.
Emotional Wellbeing	Skywalker, Timesurfer – journey of the soul
Harry Potter – it's just a story, right?	Would the real Jesus please stand up!
The song of creation	The reality of angels – beings of living flame.
Survival in the world of illusion	The pathway of accelerated spiritual growth

I would like to thank them for offering to serve in the way they have during the 12 months.

This year we have also offered branches training in any area they have chosen and also offered to support a retreat in each region. This has been taken up by several branches during the year but certainly not all.

National Council during the year developed a Five Year plan which focuses on what we would like to accomplish over this time. This is the first time the Council has gone through such a process and come up with such a plan. It will be reviewed annually and as we move forward will become more tuned and begin to focus on specific goals. This plan helps the council and national office to focus and gives us all an idea of what we are working towards in the short to medium term. It is by no means the only thing we do, as our primary goal is always to put into practice the Society's Objects.

As part of this process the National Council has also come up with a simple Vision and Mission as follows:

Vision: To inspire and serve the spiritual evolution of humanity.

Mission: To encourage enquiry with open hearts and minds into world religions, philosophy, science, and the arts; and to support the individual's endeavour to understand and apply the ageless wisdom, respect and honour all life, and achieve spiritual self-transformation.

The mission is how the Councilors see the Society's Objects being fulfilled using current language. It is not attempting to replace the Objects themselves but simply a way to express them for today, which will change from time to time.

The other main area of work for the Council over the year is in the development of policies. This includes Standards for Child Safety within TS Family Camps, Policy for TS Groups outside Branches, Use of Orewa Land, Code of Behaviour, and the Formation of Study Groups. These policies help in the work of the Management Team, giving them guidelines, as well as in the activities that are happening under the banner of the Society.

Group Meditation. This was something that came up in the Five Year Plan and has been put into action. A short meditation that can be performed by anyone, anywhere, has been put together by the National Council based on an invocation from Geoffrey Hodson (modified) and Annie Besant. This is a meditation that we can all perform in private, uniting ourselves on an inner level, to focus on creating a calm, honest, accepting NZ Society. For it to be effective, as many people as possible will need to join in the meditation every morning over a sustained period. This is one of the mechanisms that we can use to serve in New Zealand.

Office Holders for the NZ Section are as follows:

<i>Office</i>	<i>Holder</i>	<i>Term ends</i>
National President	John Vorstermans	January 2008
National Vice President	Charles Sitwell	January 2007
Treasurer	Graham Eden	January 2007
Education Coordinator	Sandy Ravelli	January 2007
Editor of Theosophy inNZ	Hugh Dixon	January 2007
Section Librarian	Sharn Laurie	January 2007

Management Team is responsible for the day to day running of the Society and meets once every four to six weeks. This team comprises the following members:

National President	John Vorstermans
National Vice President	Charles Sitwell
Treasurer	Graham Eden
Education Coordinator	Sandy Ravelli
Extra Member at large	Allan Morse (term ends in January 2007)
Extra member at large	Aroon Parshotam (term ends in January 2008)

Headquarters every year is becoming more active in work. We now can have as many as six people in the office at any time, however all the work, except that of the Office Secretary, is still done on a voluntary basis. Marilyn Hannah is the Office Secretary and the person you are most likely to connect with, when you phone or email the office. Marilyn works four days a week keeping the membership up to date, organising travel for those touring the country and often National Councilors, deals with correspondence, members letters and a thousand other necessary things that no one ever notices. She is a great person to work with and have in the office.

John Vorstermans, the National President is in the office from two to three days a week dealing with property matters for the Properties Trust Board, Management and National Council business and helping to coordinate what is going on. John is always reachable by email and phone no matter where he is.

Charles Sitwell, the National Vice President is in the office four to five days a week. Charles is our constitutional expert, helping branches with such matters, a valuable editor for anything that comes out of HQ and also continues to digitise our extensive audio library to safeguard this valuable resource for the future. Charles has also started to do some work with digitising some of the old VHS to DVDs and is the database expert in the office.

Graham Eden, the Treasurer is in the office at least two days a week ensuring that our finances are in order, helping with property matters along with memberships, as well as many other odd jobs that come up and need doing.

Sandy Ravelli, the Education Coordinator, is in the office four to five days a week and looks after the speakers programmes, branch training and retreats, providing resources for branches, the School of Theosophy program and helps with creating policy for the National Council. Sandy also puts a lot of effort into providing resources for branches and has been developing the study programme on Living and Dying. To help her gain insight and experience for this she has been spending time working with the local hospice, something that will be reflected in the outcome of the study course as well as a means of putting theosophy into action.

Sharn Laurie, our Section Librarian, continues to look after the library needs of our members and comes into the office when needed. She is usually in on Thursday mornings but is often seen at other times also. The library is moderately busy and now has expanded into DVDs also, which are starting to prove popular.

Robert Jones and Dorothy Sewell are the housekeepers and do a fine job of keeping the house and gardens looking clean and tidy. Dorothy also helps to ensure that the National Council are fed (along with help from others). Robert is an invaluable worker around the house and section doing the odd jobs that need doing, from digging foundations to mowing lawns and looking after any maintenance that comes up.

Valerie White, who was living in Vasanta House, and now moved to one of the houses in Marot Street has been a tremendous help with the house, looking after the reference library and, over the time she has been with us in Auckland, has been a great help in general where ever she is found.

Hugh Dixon, the Editor for our magazine 'Theosophy in New Zealand', has continued to make himself available and ensure that the Magazine is produced each quarter.

Eileen Styra has continued this year to produce the graphics for all our posters, plus she has been working on a completely new layout for our pamphlets, and any other graphics that are required for our work. Her work is really appreciated by everyone in the office.

Athol Wilson who spends more time than he probably would like making sure that our computers keep running.

Recently we have been looking more at media releases and the way we let the public know what is happening. It has proved in most areas that advertising in the newspapers is not really effective anymore, so other options are being considered. Warwick Keys, Clive Conland and Margarita Sisam have helped to produce some really good quality media releases which have proved very successful where they have been used.

0508-Theosophy, a toll free number, is now available around New Zealand for enquirers to be able to contact the National Office toll-free. This number will be used on advertising from now on.

Theosophical Study. As well as the programme from Headquarters, where we send speakers to branches, the branches also run their own study programmes for both the public and members. Some of the studies that branches have done during the year are as follows:

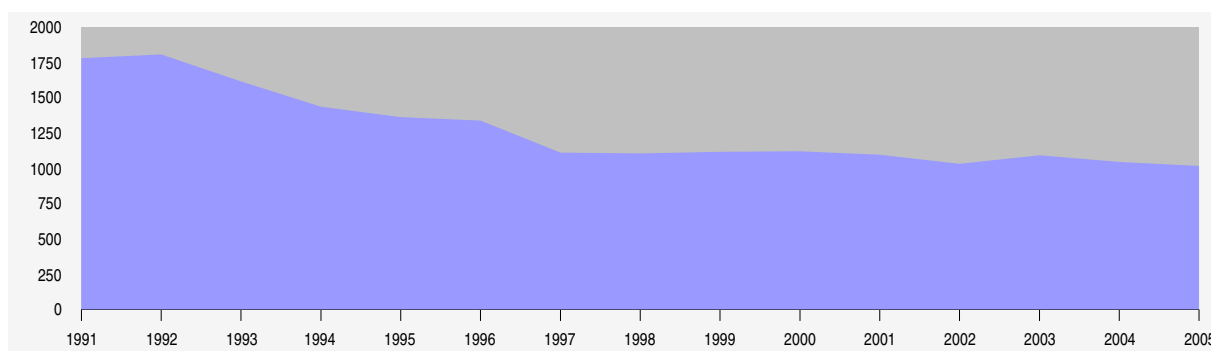
Awareness Discovery Group – exploring who we are.	Prayer, Ritual and Ceremonies from the SD.
Service Meditation.	Living a Theosophical Life.
The Unity of Connectedness.	Self, not Self and the One.
Leading a Vegetarian Life.	The Power of Group Meditation
The Impulse of Theosophy	Science of Mind
Process of Self Transformation	Influence of the T.S. on attitudes.
World of Illusion	Skywalker, Timesurfer – journey of the soul.
Islam – the Muslim point of view.	The Voice of the Silence
Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali	Environment – working with nature.

Light on the Path
The Masters in the World
World Religions
Meditation

Thinking, Feeling and Willing
Spiritual Exploration and Practice
At the Feet of the Master.

The School of Theosophy was this year directed by Vic Hao Chin Jr. from the Philippines. 25 people gathered at Tauhara center in Acacia Bay, Taupo for a seven day workshop with Vic on 'The Process of Self Transformation', a week that was, on one level, a challenge for each individual who attended and on another level, it was a real process of transformation as we all began work through the workshop. We all left the weekend with an true understanding of a process which is very valuable as part of our spiritual journey. Some branches are introducing the processes that were experienced at the workshop, with their members using the book that Vic has written on "The Process of Self Transformation". An invitation was sent to each lodge inviting one member to attend this workshop, for which the NZ Section was willing to pay travel costs. Joan Eckersley from Brisbane Lodge was our invited guest to the school.

Membership has this year decreased when compared to last year. The membership at the end of last year was 1,044 and at the 30 September 2005 was 1,018 which shows a decrease in membership of 26. The following graph shows our membership over the last 14 years.



E-Learning. We have been investigating the option of making the USA E-Learning correspondence courses available to New Zealanders. These courses can be done by an individual alone or they can elect to go through them with a course facilitator. Currently there are several people training to become the course facilitators and once they have accomplished this we will be making the courses available to members and the public in New Zealand.

There is no charge for the course itself, however the course does come with some CD which are charged for, at a minimum rate. This allows the participants to easily see the video clips that come with the course and make it so much more dynamic.

Members who passed away during the year were:

Muriel Smith of Napier	Alice Pellow of HPB, Auckland
Emily Larkin of Hamilton	Eileen Finch of Orewa
Shirely Thompson of Hamilton	Edna Aldridge of Hamilton
Ruth Metcalf of Orewa	Berin Burnett of Tauranga
John O'Connor of HPB, Auckland	Caroline Otto of Germany
Harry Toone of HPB, Auckland	Heather Bell of Orewa
John MacDonnell of Tauranga	David Fraser of Oamaru
J.C. De Vos of Gisborne	Dipali Ghosh of Palmerston North

Kenneth Smedly of HPB, Auckland

Denis Winfield of Palmerston North

John Vorstermans
National President