

A new principal for the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, India

The Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) is located in the foothills of the Himalayas in North India, in the picturesque city of Dehradun. I remember going up on the roof of the guest house in which I was staying to view the snow-capped mountains. A few days later the students hired a bus and we drove up to the mountain side town of Mussourie (2500m) to have some fun in the snow. India is a land of very hot summers but the mountains get cold in the winter.



Ministers of the PFCCI usually study at PTS. Rev Samit Mishra is an alumni, now on the board of the seminary. Rev Vishal is currently undertaking further studies at PTS. Men and women from numerous Presbyterian and Reformed churches in India, Nepal and Bhutan come to study at PTS. They come from other churches also, and some come as private students. They can undertake a diploma, a B.Th. or M.Div. PTS is affiliated with the Asian Theological Association. There are plans to open a M.Th. course soon. PTS has also started a training program for evangelists in the Hindi language, the language of Northern India.

PTS began in 1969, although its roots go back to the early days of Presbyterian Missions in Northern India. When the British rulers opened the land to non-British missionaries in 1833, Presbyterians from the USA came to the Punjab where they helped establish

medical work in Ludhiana. The RPC of USA established a work in Roorkee just north of Delhi in 1835. Some of these missionaries got caught up in the Indian Mutiny of 1857; two Presbyterian families were killed in Kanpur. It would be another eighty years before British rule in India (the Raj) came to an end.

As churches were established, a place for training local pastors became necessary. A small Bible school was set up at Roorkee and this is where PTS began in 1969. This was a joint effort between the Bible Presbyterians and RPC churches. Upheavals in Presbyterian churches in America, primarily because of liberalism, were reflected on the mission field in India. In addition to the work in Punjab and United Provinces, Scottish Presbyterians worked in the Darjeeling Hills, as well as Central and South India. Welsh Presbyterians were active in the hills of NE India after 1841, the large Presbyterian Church in Mizoram being a legacy of their work.

In 1925, eleven of the sixteen different Presbyterian and Reformed groups came together to form the United Church of North India (UCNI). Some of these churches remain today; they send men and women for training at PTS. In 2014 I was privileged to visit one of these churches in the hills beyond Darjeeling; I went to visit one of the men I had taught. In 1971 many UCNI churches joined with Methodist, Baptist and Anglican churches to form the Church of North India (CNI); this followed the formation of the CSI in 1948. This was the age of ecumenism, but this came with liberalism. These are the largest churches in India today but are Episcopalian and largely liberal. The establishment of PTS in 1969 was strategic in the light of the spread of liberalism, and later Pentecostalism.

PTS began at Roorkee but when a more suitable property became available at Dehradun in 1978 it was decided to move the 50 students to this new campus, where it continues today with around 90 students. The first principal was Rev Richard Strom from the USA- my wife, Elizabeth, went to Hebron school with his daughter. Dr Mohan Chacko became the first Indian principal in 1987; he retired in 2014. The board set about searching for a new principal. In the interim Dr Matthew Ebenezer was acting principal. In this year, 2020, a new principal will begin duties at PTS.



After a long search, the board has announced that Rev Abhishek Barla, a graduate of PTS, will be installed, God willing, on 15 August 2020.

Following his graduation in 2000 Rev Barla was assistant pastor in the Bangalore Presbyterian church. He later worked

as pastor of Ranchi Christian fellowship before joining the staff of PTS. He is currently completing studies in the USA. We rejoice with our brothers and sisters in India, and we join them in prayer for Rev Barla and a new era at PTS in India.

Dr Dennis Muldoon