



*A theological education pathway for  
Churches of Christ around the world.*

## GCS News - August 2020

*Updating our sponsors, informing our current students,  
and reaching out for others to partner with us.  
Copies available at the [GCS website](#)*

***In this newsletter:***

- [A New Kind of Mission Work](#)
- [Update on Global Christian Studies GCS](#)
- [Spotlight](#)
- [From Our Students](#)
- [Why I Studied Theology--Benny Tabalujan](#)
- [Message to Potential Students](#)



## A New Kind of Mission Work

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic which has dominated our lives in 2020, some things have not changed. God is still good. Jesus is still our Savior. The cross is still the pivotal event of all history. People are still lost. The church continues to have a mission.

How do we share the Gospel in the midst of physical distancing, curtailed travel, distrust of outsiders, and whatever the post-Covid-19 world brings? My wife, Sally, is in a Bible study on Whatsapp with a woman in Brazil. Next week, I'll be in a Zoom prayer session with two elderships, one in Oklahoma and the other in Australia. A preacher friend of mine is starting to use the mail-centered program of World Bible School in the inner city.

In the midst of all this, there's Global Christian Studies. GCS is a new kind of mission work. GCS provides a pathway for leaders in Churches of Christ from all over the world to study for a master's degree in Bible online with a Bible college affiliated with Churches of Christ in America. This will deepen their understanding of the Bible and ministry and equip them to better teach, write, preach, and lead in their home countries. GCS students stay in their locations, teach their Sunday school classes, care for their families, and even work their jobs – all the while studying online under the tutelage of some of the best Bible teachers among Churches of Christ in America.

Through GCS, churches and individuals can now support the preaching and teaching of the Gospel around the world. It does not involve sending Americans to another continent or a family from Texas to learn an African language, or an evangelistic couple from Tennessee to engage an Asian culture. GCS allows American churches and individuals to help train Christian leaders who live in their native countries all over the world. GCS is currently involved with people in Venezuela, Bolivia, India, Australia, Switzerland, Ghana, and Nigeria.

Our American supporters stay at home as do the men from Nigeria. The Texans do not have to learn the language of India nor does the man from India have to learn American culture. During times of social distancing, limited international travel, and concern about how to spread the Gospel in our changed environment, GCS offers a viable, effective, and efficient alternative, getting the Gospel in the hands of capable people who speak the language and know the customs of their own people.

## An Update on GCS

GCS is continuing its steady expansion. During the 2019-20 school year, GCS sponsored four students who studied online at Harding School of Theology (HST) in Memphis: Nathan Wilson of Brisbane, Australia, Nancy Wu Won of Melbourne, Australia, Emmanuel Adeoye and Jasper Kizito, both of Western Nigeria Christian College in Africa. All four did well and are continuing their studies at HST in the Fall of 2020.

GCS is now liaising with other potential students who are considering entering the GCS pathway. Two are in Ukraine, one in Switzerland, one in India, one is a teacher in Ghana, another is a preacher in Venezuela, and one is church leader in Bolivia. The world-wide pandemic has slowed the process of students applying for GCS, but we are still able to move forward.

Our sponsors and partners continue to grow. An anonymous donor has agreed to sponsor three new students for the Fall. A Texas church has tentatively agreed to sponsor another student. Three other American congregations are considering how they might support GCS students.

GCS is actively seeking additional students and sponsors. Students are urged to consult the GCS website: [www.gcspathway.org](http://www.gcspathway.org) for how to engage with GCS. They can also email John Coffey ([jcoffey@harding.edu](mailto:jcoffey@harding.edu)) or Harold Shank ([drharoldshank@gmail.com](mailto:drharoldshank@gmail.com)).

Churches and individuals who wish to immediately undertake a new way of mission work involving the training of church leaders from around the world are urged to consider being a GCS sponsor. One donor or congregation can provide quality training for a church leader for \$5,000 per year for five years.

To help ensure a high level of accountability, GCS funds and accounts are managed by one of our overseeing congregations, the Eastside Church of Christ in Midwest City, Oklahoma. Our other overseeing congregation is the Belmore Road Church of Christ in suburban Melbourne, Australia. The elderships at Eastside and Belmore Road also meet all administrative and operational costs of GCS. That means 100% of all financial support from GCS partners and sponsors is earmarked to assist students on the GCS pathway.

Current sponsors are urged to spread the word. Copies of a flyer explaining GCS are available from Harold Shank ([drharoldshank@gmail.com](mailto:drharoldshank@gmail.com)).

## GCS Spotlight

*Brief updates on GCS students, staff, and sponsoring congregations*

**Benny Tabalujan**, one of the founders of GCS, graduated with a Master of Theology from the University of Glasgow in July 2020.

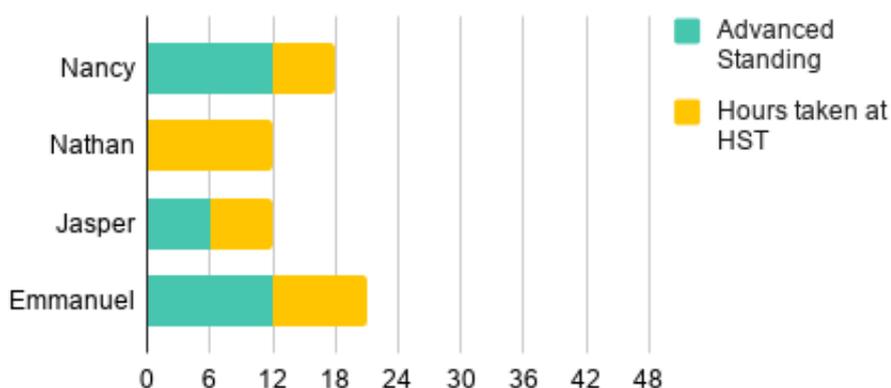
His thesis, “Improving Church Governance: Lessons from Governance Failures in Different Church Polities,” focuses on whether a particular church polity raises the likelihood of governance failure. He examines six case studies of church governance failures reported in the past two decades. Benny identifies two structural characteristics which feature in these churches--the presence of one prominent and influential leader (causing the church to lean towards a one-person leadership model; “monarchicalism”), and a sense of

distance or opacity in decision-making at one or more levels of church polity (“hierarchicalism”). The study concludes by offering six practical recommendations concerning church governance.

**Dr. Harold Shank**, Director of GCS, has a new book published by ACU press: *Listen and Make Room: Joining God in Welcoming*

*Children*. <https://store.acupressbooks.com/products/listen-and-make-room>

## Student Progress



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## From Our Students

### ATR

*By Nancy Wu Won, GCS student*

Advanced Theological Research (ATR) is a course taught by Bob Turner, who is the Library Director of Harding School of Theology. ATR prepares students for writing papers for the rest of their program. I completed the week-long intensive held on campus in January 2020.

Bob Turner introduced us to various research tools, ranging from finding reference books on the shelf to accessing various online databases and other electronic resources. The HST library has an impressive collection and is so well equipped that other schools of theology come and access its resources-that’s how good it is. Polishing writing skills and how to deliver information was also addressed. The last two days of the intensive were spent on a spiritual formation retreat.

Now, you may be thinking that class time may have been banal and that coupled with jet lag, I could have been nodding off. Let me assure you that Bob Turner, with his Masters in

Divinity, Masters of Science in Library and Information Science, not only was knowledgeable, he had an engaging style in the classroom, and could have easily passed for a TV late show host with his witty repartee.

I believe it's important to do the class in person because it's hard to beat face to face learning where you can meet professors and fellow students, wander around the library, thumb through pages, and smell the history. During the spiritual formation retreat, I found it comforting that the struggles in studying a theology degree from afar were experienced by others and that at the end of the day, it's not about getting an 'A'. It is about the growth in Christ which occurs because of the ministry of study.

After the week at HST, there was follow up work which included a final exam, a bibliographic essay, and a multimedia book review. For my book review, I chose Stanley Fish's How to Write a Sentence and How to Read One and I had fun creating a video for it. The bibliographic essay worth 40% was a gargantuan project for me. Despite struggling to grapple the theological concepts, I realized that this mysterious God we serve somehow engaged with my inner being as I sought Him in the study process. I just know my faith has grown deeper. ATR is an important course because the skills learned are fundamental for completing papers for future courses.

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## **Interview with Nathan Wilson, GCS student**

### **Tell why you are working on a degree at HST**

I'm a member of the Church of Christ and am committed to those values. Having the opportunity to study ministry at a graduate and post-graduate level, in a school that shared my values, was a unique opportunity I could not find locally.

### **Share your family of origin background (parents, grandparents)**

My father, Steve Wilson, is from Sydney and my mother, Donette Wilson, is from Texas. Dad was working as a signwriter in Sydney and my mother was fresh out of high school before they met in Florida. Dad moved to Florida to study the Bible and met my mother in the college library. After their marriage, they soon moved back to Sydney where Dad began working as a preacher. It was a difficult move for my mother leaving home for a foreign country she had never seen before. Keeping in touch with her family and friends overseas was more difficult in the eighties than it is now. International phone calls were up to a dollar a minute. But she was devoted to Dad, and as a couple, they have been a blessing to the church here in Australia. I have two younger sisters. Hannah is now married and has a six-month-old son. Caitlin is in high school.

At twenty-seven I still have all my grandparents on both sides. I consider it a rare privilege to have known my grandparents as a child and as an adult.

### **Tell us about the neighborhood and city where you live?**

I live in the Redlands Coast which is eighteen kilometers south of Brisbane City.

I have lived most of my life in the Redlands and feel closely connected to the area. It's no holiday destination, but there are a few islands off the coast that have beautiful scenery such as Stradbroke Island. If you come to visit me and want a tourist experience, I'll probably take you for a hike on Straddie.

### **Tell of your church experience**

Our family moved between states when I was younger. Finally, we settled in Queensland where Dad was involved in a church plant in 1997. The Point Church became where I grew up. After finishing my undergraduate degree in 2013, I moved to Sydney for three years where I joined Eastside Church of Christ in Bondi. They were a smaller congregation of approximately forty people. Those three years were an important part of my spiritual development. The challenges of being in a small church taught me church is about what you give, not what you get. When I returned to The Point Church in 2017, I had a fresh outlook and was understanding my call to ministry.

### **Tell about your spouse. What does she think about your degree program?**

Katrina and I have been married for one year. We're great support for each other spiritually, and I love her very much. She encourages me in my study and knows how important it is for my development.

### **What have you most enjoyed about being at HST?**

The professors have all been deeply passionate about the subjects they teach, which helps me get excited about what I'm learning. You need that when learning things that are new or challenging. It gives you energy.

### **How do you see the degree helping you in ministry?**

In more ways than I know. Even in the short term I am applying what I am learning to the youth ministries I'm currently involved in. How I research a topic for a Bible class, counsel a struggling teenager, prioritize my time and learn from my mistakes are all heavily influenced by the time I have invested in studying at HST.

### **Share a word of encouragement with our donors. What do you think about GCS?**

GCS has provided me with a life-changing opportunity. Their support is setting me on the right track as I begin life in ministry. Having their support gives me confidence that I'm where God wants me to be.

### **Why should others consider GCS?**

GCS has a lot to give. The staff, supporters, and donors are extremely generous. They believe in the importance of ministry education and will do all they can to help you succeed in your study.

**What classes are you taking next?**

My next class will be a Bible study on Acts with Dr. Richard Oster.

**Tell about a recent sermon you preached or class you taught or a person you served**

I lead a Friday night youth group for The Point Church with my wife. We have a devotional time that I lead in the second half of the night after a series of games and activities. We just finished a series on surrendering to Jesus. A constant challenge with the youth has been encouraging them to share their thoughts with each other about their spiritual lives. Questions are met with silence and opportunities to share lead to the discussion getting off-topic. So, I tried something new which has worked! We all have journals that everyone writes in during the week based on something they read in the Bible or observed in themselves or others. On Fridays, the youth must share something with the group from their journal. This has led to a more fluid and open discussion time which naturally transitions into prayer. I'm seeing a new level of spiritual maturity in the group which excites me.

**What is your strongest quality?**

Recognizing other people's talents for the purpose of bringing them together for common purposes. I think the Gallup Strengths Finder calls it 'Connectedness' in leadership. My spiritual gifts are both leadership and teaching.

**What do you want to say that I have not asked?**

I am grateful to all those who are making my study possible. And I am grateful to God who has graciously blessed me in this new stage of my life.

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## Why I Studied Theology—

*By Benny Tabalujan, Melbourne, Australia*

For some time prior to 2012, while a deacon, I had been asked to join the eldership at Belmore Road Church of Christ. I eventually agreed and joined the eldership in August 2012. Anticipating this step, I felt the need to increase my understanding of Scripture.

It so happened that my workload in 2012 could be adjusted to allow me to do this. At that time, I was a co-owner of a consulting company focusing on learning & development for lawyers. So I began Bible studies at Melbourne School of Theology, a local inter-denominational seminary whose degrees are validated by the Australian College of Theology (ACT).

I was awarded a Graduate Diploma in Divinity by the ACT in January 2014.

Around that time, I was also keen to start a program to bring Bible instructors from Church of Christ colleges in America to teach in Australia. Having undertaken studies at local seminaries with different denominational perspectives, I felt it would be good for Churches of Christ in Australia to have access to biblical training from qualified instructors who are sympathetic to restoration ideals. With some friends, we launched the Klesis Bible Program in 2014 in collaboration with Harding University in Searcy. Between 2014-2018, Klesis ran six intensive modules, with Harding professors teaching intensive classes in Melbourne which are accredited by Harding. Around 22 different students participated in one or more modules.

In 2016 I was attracted to the idea of undertaking a research degree in Bible. Pursuing a master's degree helped satisfy my intellectual curiosity and would also provide useful credentials if I decided to teach Bible in future. After looking around, I enrolled at Edinburgh Theological Seminary in Scotland (ETS courses are validated by the University of Glasgow). I completed my ETS research thesis on church governance in late 2019. In July 2020, I graduated with a Master of Theology from the University of Glasgow.

These theological studies have helped me enormously in my role as church elder, not to mention my roles as a husband and parent. They have given me greater confidence in teaching Bible classes, preaching sermons, and studying Scripture with individuals. I'm also more aware of where Churches of Christ and the broader Restoration Movement fit within church history. The studies have also allowed me to interact with many interesting people, each of whom has taught me something. God is good!

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## GCS Overseeing Congregations

**Eastside Church of Christ**, 916 South Douglas Blvd, Midwest City, OK 73130  
([www.eastsidechurchofchrist.info](http://www.eastsidechurchofchrist.info)).

Their elders include Sam Brandon, Ricky Bugher, Ron Cannefax, and David Walton.

**Belmore Road Church of Christ**, 100 Rostrevor Parade, Mont Albert North, Victoria 3129, Australia ([www.belmoreroadchurch.org.au](http://www.belmoreroadchurch.org.au)).

Their elders are Charles Hooi and Benny Tabalujan.

**GCS is actively seeking additional students and sponsors. Students are urged to consult the GCS website: [www.gcspathway.org](http://www.gcspathway.org) for how to engage with GCS. They can also email John Coffey ([jcoffey@harding.edu](mailto:jcoffey@harding.edu)) or Harold Shank ([drharoldshank@gmail.com](mailto:drharoldshank@gmail.com))**

## Message to Potential Students

GCS seeks students from around the globe who live outside the US, who have an accredited bachelor's degree, and have the full recommendation of their local congregation. The process of being accepted by GCS and enrolling in a US school takes about four months. Students who attend HST can do all their work online (high speed internet is required), but must take the course Advanced Theological Research on site in Memphis. GCS pays the student's expenses for this Memphis trip.

The total cost of an accredited graduate degree in Bible or ministry is about \$50,000. HST provides a generous scholarship, GCS donors give \$5,000 per year for five years and the student is required to contribute \$2,600 toward their degree.

For more information: visit [www.gcspathway.org](http://www.gcspathway.org) or email us at [gcspathwayinfo@gmail.com](mailto:gcspathwayinfo@gmail.com)

## Find out more

Find out more at: [www.gcspathway.org](http://www.gcspathway.org)  
or go to the GCS landing page on the HST website: <https://hst.edu/gcspathway/>  
Email us at: [gcspathwayinfo@gmail.com](mailto:gcspathwayinfo@gmail.com)

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