



HANDING ON THE BATON

Steve Fouch and **Liz Capper** share the story of how the various nurses' and midwives' fellowships evolved in the UK since the 1990s.



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Those following Mark Pickering's *Triple Helix* articles 'lessons from the archives' will know that nursing has a strongly Christian heritage.¹ This influence was evident in many hospitals even up to the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, a secular perspective has influenced every part of British society, including nursing, moving

Christian faith to the margins.

The first formally constituted fellowship for Christian nurses was set up in Scotland in 1932, with an England and Wales fellowship (Nurses Christian Fellowship or NCF) set up ten years later. NCF Scotland and NCF England and Wales both started and ran as fellowships in nurses' homes in hospitals, especially training hospitals across the UK. Shift work, curfews, and other limitations in those days made it hard for nurses to engage with church life, and the NCFs were vital to the spiritual life, spiritual formation, and pastoral support of students and the newly qualified in particular.

NCF England and Wales also set up a clinical refresher course for missionary nurses and midwives each summer, which merged with the CMF course for doctors in the nineties and runs to this day. The global perspective of both fellowships was strong, and they mobilised and supported many members who went on to serve overseas over the decades.

However, as training moved out of the hospital and into universities, and nurses' homes closed, this model became less relevant. Both fellowships found engaging with students and getting graduates together in fellowships was becoming harder.

By the 1990s, the England and Wales NCF was on its knees as its membership dwindled and attendance at events shrank. There were conversations with CMF about some coming together, but eventually, NCF decided against this and closed in 1995. It bequeathed some of its remaining funds to support nurses and midwives in attending the medical missionary refresher course now run by CMF and the Medical Missionary Association.

And there the story could have stopped, but for the students. For many years, UCCF had been developing a ministry among nursing students, and in the early nineties, Annie Leggett became their first Christian student nurses' staff worker. Under their banner, she picked up the baton NCF had laid down. She visited students countrywide and organised conferences that had a lasting impact. Later, these were shared with students from the Professions Allied to Medicine. These conferences continued for many years, giving birth to the Christian Therapists Network and, most recently, to a new movement, Christians in Allied Health.²



SCAN FOR MORE

Soon, Annie realised there was no fellowship or network for the students she worked with once they graduated. So, with several others, she started seeking graduates interested in setting something up, primarily through World Alive. A small, London-based group of senior staff nurses took up that baton, and in 2001, Christian Nurses and Midwives (CNM) was born. It was self-financed; the leadership group covered all costs, but there was a small membership fee for those who joined. When UCCF had to shut down its professional student networks a couple of years later, Tim James (currently on the CMF Board) began a student ministry in CNM in 2005.

Meanwhile, NCF Scotland continued, but it also found engaging with students harder and harder. Links with CNM were good, but with limited resources, both movements could do little together.

In 2008, one by one, the founding members realised they could no longer commit to leading CNM. The future of the fledgling fellowship was in jeopardy, so the remaining leaders asked the two Council of Reference members (Steve Fouch and Liz Capper) to take over the leadership alongside the treasurer (Angela Thavaraj) and form the CNM Council. Shortly after this, CNM was set up as a registered charity, and the baton passed to a new leadership.

Meanwhile, CMF took on the CNM student work. They appointed Annie Leggett and, later, Dimity Grant-Frost as student staff workers tasked with building student work for CNM. This was not an easy task in itself. Working effectively for two organisations was challenging, but Annie and Dimity laid the foundations for what was to follow, networking with and growing multiple student groups across Britain.

Eventually, in 2014, the CNM Council accepted CMF's offer to take over all the work amongst nurses and midwives. In a new start, Pippa Peppiatt came on board as the new student staff worker, working alongside the Head of Nurses Ministries, Steve Fouch. She eventually took the baton from Steve, leading CMF's nurses and midwives ministry until the end of 2023. Under Pippa's leadership, the fellowship doubled in size to nearly 500. The team grew, in particular drawing in Georgie Coster, who had been one of Annie and Dimity's early 'recruits' to CNM. Georgie was Pippa's right-hand woman for many years, with a deep passion to see Christian students living and speaking for Jesus in their work and studies. During this time, many new fellowships opened up in nursing and midwifery schools across the UK.

In 2018, NCF Scotland (now renamed Christian Nurses and Midwives Fellowship Scotland) also folded and gave CMF some funds to carry on nurses and midwives' ministry in Scotland.

I have been struck by God's kindness in watching over Christian nurses and midwives over the decades. When things looked a bit tricky, God has come along again and again, providing people and organisations for Christian nurses and midwives to find a home where they can meet and be encouraged to live out their faith in the professional world. And all this is not to forget the constants who have walked the walk with so many of us, Liz Capper, Tim James, and others. What a good God we have and one that we can trust in for the future too!

Annie Leggett, 2024

It is worth noting that the idea of merging the nurses and midwives fellowship with CMF was not new – it was certainly being mooted in the 1990s, and it was strongly supported by the current CMF President (John Wyatt), two former General Secretaries (Keith Sanders and Andrew Fergusson), and by several of those who led the nurses work, including Liz Capper, Sally-Ann Jenkins (now Foster, who succeeded Annie at UCCF) and several others, including the then CMF CEO, Peter Saunders.

The global mission focus of the old NCFs was not lost either. Both NCFs were founders of Nurses Christian Fellowship International (NCFI), and NCF Scotland had been very active in leading the international fellowship. CNM joined in 2004 after three of the CNM Council (Tim James, Angela Thavaraj, and Steve Fouch) were supported by a CMF grant to attend the NCFI World Congress in Seoul that year. Steve went on to chair NCFI Europe and to sit on the International Board. When CNM merged with CMF, it too, became a full member of NCFI in 2015.

Meanwhile, the old missionary refresher course became the Developing Health Course, and several nurses and midwives have been active as course directors and teachers over the years. Furthermore, Pippa initiated the Global Track to give young health professionals a leg up into global healthcare mission. That programme is still running at CMF under the leadership of the Global team and has had nearly 100 participants over the years.

The baton has passed on again in the nurses and midwives work, with Pippa leaving at the end of 2023 to be succeeded by Bex Lawton. Many who were there at the start have stepped back but continue to support from the sidelines, including Liz Capper, Georgie Coster, Tim James, and Steve Fouch. But a new generation of leaders with a fresh vision for the ministry has taken up the baton. The race is far from run, and while the fellowship and ministry have grown over the last three decades, there is still a long way to go. But we must now hand it over to Bex Lawton to tell that part of the story. ●



CNM Council 2006: L-R - Richard Greenall, Angela Thavaraj, Steve Fouch, Liz Capper, Sally-Anne Jenkins, Rachel and Tim James.



The original CNM Council, 2001: L-R - Peter Swift, Ros Holliday, Louise Philpott, and Sally-Anne Jenkins

key points



- Changes in professional culture and the secularisation of the country led to the closure of the two previous nurses and midwives Christian fellowships in the UK.
- Student ministry led to a rebirth, but it was a challenge to lead and resource the fledgling fellowship.
- Coming together with CMF had a profound impact, and after a decade, the nurses and midwives fellowship and ministry are growing and developing in new directions.

References (accessed 07/03/2024)

1. Pickering M. lessons from the archive – episode 3: Christian influences on the modern nursing profession. *Triple Helix*, 83; Spring 2023. cmf.li/40c/nj0
2. ciah.org.uk