

Tabor Churches of Christ Study Centre Launch

Mark Riessen, Director TCOCSC

This really is an exciting partnership between Tabor and Churches of Christ in SA.

I count myself to be extremely privileged to occupy the role of director for the establishment of this study centre and facilitating it as we anticipate a future together, serving God, listening to God's Spirit leading us and preparing disciples forming for ministry in the world

So what is it exactly that I will be doing as director of the Tabor Churches of Christ Study Centre?

First of all I must be clear that I am appointed to the role on the basis of 1 day per week as a complimentary extension to my full time role with the Churches of Christ state office where I work in the area of church health, mission engagement and discipleship development

Having said that there can still be some ambiguity around what this might look like as it's a new venture and we are pioneering new territory

Let me start by outlining 3 core objectives:

- Teaching our Churches of Christ denominational distinctives course.
 - A presence of campus will enable opportunities for connection with Churches of Christ students
 - To research in areas of mutual interest to both Tabor and Churches of Christ
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- 1) Teaching our Churches of Christ denominational distinctives course. Up until now we have offered this course through our state office as a light intensive for those engaging the ministry endorsement process with Churches of Christ. This has been about raising awareness of the identifying markers of our movement for those preparing for ordained ministry.
 - We will now be offering Churches of Christ history and identity as a subject at Tabor for audit, undergraduate and post graduate study. We'll offer it for the first time next semester on a 2 year rotation.
 - This opens up possibilities for us to use the resources of the college to engage with our national and international partners as presenters for the course and we will be able to offer the course online for distance learning. It is my hope that not only will people training for ministry engage with the course but others will see this as an opportunity to sink deeper roots into understanding the movement we are part of as Churches of Christ and get a taste for studying theological education.
 - 2) A presence of campus will enable opportunities for connection with Churches of Christ students

- I look forward to offering pastoral care to students on campus and online
 - Being influenced by my own experience of theological college I am looking forward to offering opportunities for vocational discernment and guiding students on ministry pathways that might be suitable to their gifting a calling
 - Ministry pathways are very diverse, not all path ways lead to traditional congregational ministry. It may be various avenues of chaplaincy, missional community, parachurch or being a well formed disciple for another kind of work place
 - What this presence on campus enables for all students is an identifiable connection to a denomination body or movement, who will help them discern within a ministry framework and connect students with ministry placement opportunities
 - This is exciting for us and our churches in particular because we haven't ever really had something this intentional established here in Adelaide for Churches of Christ. We now have a proactive presence with a local theological college contributing to the formation of a new generation of Christian leaders.
- 3) To research in areas of mutual interest to both Tabor and Churches of Christ
- I'm not exactly sure what this looks like yet but if the activity of my Masters research, and work with Churches of Christ over the past year is anything to go by, it could be in one or all of the following areas
 - Assessing church health, mission and ministry sustainability
 - Assisting Christian communities to respond to the Mission of God in their local context
 - Discipleship development as the identifying marker and core business of the church
 - But Aaron might have other plans for me

I've only been here a month but already the collaboration opportunities with Tabor staff and establishing connections with students has been a great gift to me and my role with Churches of Christ

I have discovered that we have around 20 students enrolled this semester who identify as being part of Churches of Christ. That's not including the online Churches of Christ students or the people who have told me they plan to enrol for semester 2

- This includes new students enrolling for the first time, so it gives them support from the start and others are long term or returning students
- So taking that into context what I look forward to doing as the semester starts is organizing a few gatherings throughout the semester for Churches of Christ students to connect and build a sense of collegiality with one another. Most students are discerning a ministry pathway so we ought to have a forum for supporting and praying for one another.
- Rather than being a scattered community (maybe accidentally bumping into each other now and again) we can be an integrated community within the

same movement of churches together (The COC students have already received an introduction letter from me declaring this intention.)

- I have also had students cross my path who are not really connected or affiliated with a denomination so this creates opportunities to support other students and offer a ministry pathway for them to consider through Churches of Christ.

My hope is that this will be a study centre not exclusively for those who are journeying toward ordination but for all within Churches of Christ and other for that matter, who want to develop a little deeper in their discipleship journey following Jesus.

Yes this is a higher Ed theological college but it's also a place where I believe we can encounter Jesus in a new way in the class room and in the relationships with build with other students.

This is one way we can enrich and revitalize our church communities as discipleship making communities proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and living into the calling to participate in God's mission in their midst.

Some people have asked me "what about Stirling Theological College?"

Our college in Melbourne has always been front and centre in my mind as we explored this venture. As soon as we were able we included Andrew Menzies (Principal) in the conversation and he was excited about the emerging possibilities.

As a director of the Stirling Theological College board I would only want to see something that contributed to the life and possibility of the college with collaborative relationships across the state border.

We will continue to talk about how a relationship between Tabor and Stirling might look as we work together towards common goals.

I really look forward to engaging more people in the conversation about what we are doing here and hope you will go back to your communities and talk about this as a great and positive relationship for the building up of the Church in SA and NT

Please come and talk to me through the year and if you're thinking about studying, there have never been a more exciting time to engage with us in this space.