

# The Independent Schools Christian Alliance



Mark Greenstock is the General Secretary of The Independent Schools Christian Alliance (TISCA).

He is a reader in the Church of England and actively involved in local ministry. His leisure pursuits include hill-walking, travelling and playing real tennis (the original version). He is married and has three children and three grandchildren.

Mark has served on ACT's Board of Directors since November 2003. He currently edits the *Resource Reviews / Digest* section of the ACT website.

*Then there is the need for the private sector to have a Christian voice in education*

## Acts 22:22

Those *ACT Now* readers who think that teachers in private education are unworthy of calling themselves Christians, and deserve no support whatsoever, should read no further if they wish to keep their blood pressure anywhere near normal.

First, some personal revelations. I was brought up and educated, and spent my entire teaching career, in so-called 'public' schools (not all the same one). I have recently retired to within comfortable range of some more of the same. Readers' reactions may well be the same as the crowd who heard Paul speak: 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!' (Acts 22:22.)

When I reveal that my teaching specialism was the Latin and Greek classics, that my experience has been mainly confined to single-sex boarding schools, and that for twelve years I was a housemaster in charge of seventy boys aged 13–18, readers' credulity may be strained to breaking-point.

## TISCA and ACT

On the other hand, I might be a good candidate for being General Secretary of The Independent Schools Christian Alliance. Which I am (secretary, that is – not necessarily a good candidate).

TISCA exists to support, bring together and equip all involved with the independent sector of education. It was founded in 1995 by a group of Heads who wanted to encourage fellowship among Christian teachers in their sphere of operations. They were well aware of the existence of ACT, of course, and realising that its main clientele was the maintained sector, aimed to establish a similar association which would work in close relationship with ACT so that both associations would benefit reciprocally.

I was a member of ACT almost from its inception and valued the work it was doing and the fine magazines (*Spectrum*, etc) it produced.

On retirement from teaching, I was wondering what the Lord wanted me to do with all that continuous holiday, when a letter arrived out of the blue from Tim Hastie-Smith, Headmaster of Dean Close and Chairman of the TISCA Board of Trustees. Would I continue the good work done by Michael Hepworth, recently a Head in Sheffield, over the last four years?

## Full-time part-time work

I met Michael, was convinced by his infectious laugh, believed his assurance that it was only a couple of days' work a week, and duly took over in October 2002. Since then I have been continuously on the go, preparing and attending meetings, editing the termly newsletter, staffing and maintaining the office, and finding my holidays reduced to six weeks a year. I am due to retire this autumn, to the relief of my wife who governs three (independent!) schools and has plans for me to do something about the garden.

I have never regretted it for one moment, though it has been hard work. Teachers don't find it easy to come to meetings. Most of them belong to local



Ruth and Hugh Bradby

churches or Christian organisations which keep them from going spiritually bankrupt. During term-time they are kept firmly with their nose to several grindstones at once, and in the holidays they want to forget about anything to do with school.

## A role to play

I think TISCA has a role to play in various ways. To start with, among our 350 or so members (from about 160 schools, not all of which would call themselves 'Christian' schools) there are not a few who are in lonely positions among their colleagues and need the encouragement of belonging to a fellowship which is prepared to hold meetings in their locality and be available for advice and encouragement.

Then there is the need for the private sector to have a Christian voice in education. We have recently been represented, alongside ACT, at consultations with the DfES about the Equality Bill, and have been able to reflect views of Heads about the need for educational freedom in teaching Christian morality. There are other issues which require careful handling and a non-strident but consistently firm approach.

Finally, we have provided opportunities for teachers and senior pupils to hear a Christian voice on issues such as leadership, sex education and 'gap' years. A special feature has been the regional meetings held in various schools, where hearing a speaker, discussing a passage of the Bible, enjoying a good meal together and meeting colleagues from other schools have meant refreshment and stimulus to Christians scattered over a given area.

## Hugh and Ruth

I am handing over the reins this autumn to someone much better qualified. Hugh Bradby has been with TISCA since it started and is finishing his time as Head of Kingsmead in the Wirral. He and his wife Ruth will be living in Leamington Spa which is better suited to a UK-wide ministry than Sherborne in Dorset (my domicile). I have enjoyed my time with TISCA: I have made many new friends and have been encouraged by all that God is doing even in such no-go areas as the private schools. As FW Faber puts it: *'For the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind; and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.'*

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