

SERVING OUR GLOBAL NEIGHBOURS IN VANUATU

Brian and Ally Mackay began the year teaching at Talua Theological Training Institute in Vanuatu. They were loving their time there until the Covid-19 Pandemic hit. Here is their story, written just before the difficult decision was taken to return to New Zealand.

“They are our neighbours and they need us”

Those were the words that helped us to see the call to travel from Knox Presbyterian Church, Dannevirke, to Talua Theological Training Institute, Santo, Vanuatu for 2020. We had always kept an interest in mission work. Our prayers for God’s guidance, discussions with others and family situation led us to the point where we were ready to take the leap. We arrived in late January and intended to remain until December.

We settled in very well and were coping with the heat most of the time. We loved the relaxed, friendly, generous environment there and were constantly amazed by the beauty in our surroundings. We moved into Heniko House on the campus, which is funded and maintained by PCANZ Global Mission.

Our teaching and administration work there was quite varied and drew us out of our comfort zones. We found it an exciting challenge and relished the chance to develop new skills. Our experience as high school teachers helped us in course design, policy and procedure writing, and of course, working with the students.

Ally was teaching English and study skills to the foundation students, preparing them for their start on a Bachelor of Theology degree next year. Brian had a stronger administration focus with policy updating (he spent a week at a Vanuatu Qualifications Authority course). He was also teaching computing skills to students and staff.

We loved living in a God-centred community. The gong and the roosters competed to wake us at 5am and there were many opportunities for personal and corporate devotions during the week. The generator shutting down at 9pm signaled that it was bedtime (very radical for us night-owls!).



Brian and Ally outside their staff house, and with some local children on the Talua campus



Community life also involved working around the campus, trips on the back of the “Truck” (Ute) to town one hour away (20km... a very bumpy road!), We enjoyed building relationships with our student and staff neighbours in the buildings surrounding us. They welcomed us and showed us how to make a garden, how to harvest and eat the many tropical fruits available, and it was not unusual for someone to arrive on our doorstep with butter fruit (avocado) laplap (a Vanuatu favourite), and other local delicacies. We reciprocated in small ways with cake (the traditional ex-pat dish – mostly banana cake). Ally’s icing was a big hit!

While there were no confirmed cases of coronavirus in Vanuatu (as of mid-March), the school formulated plans and practices to put into place both now and in the future. Vanuatu has no means to test for this disease and very limited health resources to cope with an outbreak. Your prayers in this matter would be appreciated.

Brian and Ally were deeply disappointed that they had to return home early. Fortunately, they are able to continue supporting Talua by writing policies and doing other work remotely. They said, “It was a real privilege to be at Talua and continue the valued partnership between PCANZ and PCV. We felt like we were part of something pretty special, and hope there will be time to return later in 2020. Despite the challenges faced by the coronavirus we encourage anyone who may be thinking about doing something like this to talk with us, and also with Global Mission Coordinator Phil King.”