

Left: Hundreds of brothers and sisters gather on March 8, 1947, at the Wellington Town Hall for a special assembly. Right: Outside of Bethel offices at 69 Kent Terrace in Wellington, New Zealand

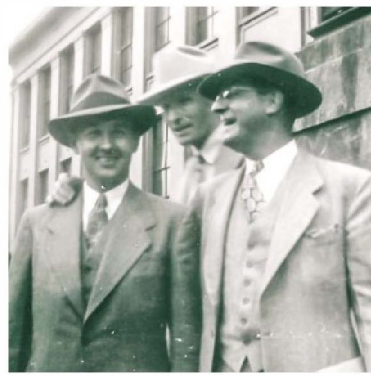
MARCH 7, 2022
NEW ZEALAND

Seventy-Five Years of "Legally Establishing" the Good News in New Zealand

March 2022 marks 75 years since Jehovah's Witnesses received legal recognition in New Zealand. On March 7, 1947, Brothers Nathan H. Knorr, Milton Henschel, and Charles Clayton, the first Gilead-trained missionary in New Zealand, visited the New Zealand Parliament. Government officials gave the brothers paperwork granting legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses. Today, the preaching work continues to flourish, and some 14,500 publishers are active in the country.

The Kingdom message first reached New Zealand in 1898. The number of publishers grew steadily. The Catholic Church, upset with how our literature shed light on Bible truth, stirred up public sentiment against Jehovah's Witnesses. On October 24, 1940, the government imposed a ban on our activity. But Parliament amended the ban on May 8, 1941, and allowed the brothers to meet and to engage in the ministry. However, they could use only the Bible, not our literature. The ban was officially lifted on March 29, 1945, and the number of publishers began to flourish once again. Just two years later, the number of Kingdom preachers grew by 40 percent, which was a new peak of 659 brothers and sisters proclaiming the good news.

Brother Knorr decided to visit New Zealand as part of his worldwide service tour in 1947. It was during this trip that he visited Parliament.



From left to right: Brothers Charles Clayton, Milton Henschel, and Nathan H. Knorr outside of Parliament after receiving documents granting Jehovah's Witnesses legal recognition in 1947

After securing legal recognition, a branch office was established in Wellington to provide greater organization for the ministry. Brother Robert Lazenby was appointed as the first branch servant.

Regarding the new branch office and the growing number of publishers, Brother Knorr later wrote in a report about New Zealand: "All were willing to assume the new responsibilities of supporting a branch and pressing on under its direction."

On March 8-9, 1947, Brothers Knorr and Henschel spoke at a special assembly held at the Wellington Town Hall, with the afternoon session held at the nearby technical college. Nearly 500 brothers and sisters were in attendance.

Sister Beryl Todd, who was then 17, recalls: "It was the biggest assembly I had been to, and it was a thrill to have Brother Knorr there." Baptized that day at a nearby public pool was Clyde Canty, who would later serve as the coordinator of the New Zealand branch.

On March 10, 1947, another 300 people gathered in Auckland to hear talks by Brothers Knorr, Henschel, and Lazenby. Brother Knorr reported that he could see the potential for future growth in New Zealand. "I am sure the work will increase here," he said. "The prospects for this territory are excellent."

Brother Knorr's words proved true. New Zealand experienced an average increase of 18 percent over the next eight years. By 1955, there were 2,519 publishers. The country reached 10,000 publishers in 1989.

We are thankful to Jehovah for helping our brothers to legally establish the good news in New Zealand.—Philippians 1:7.

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