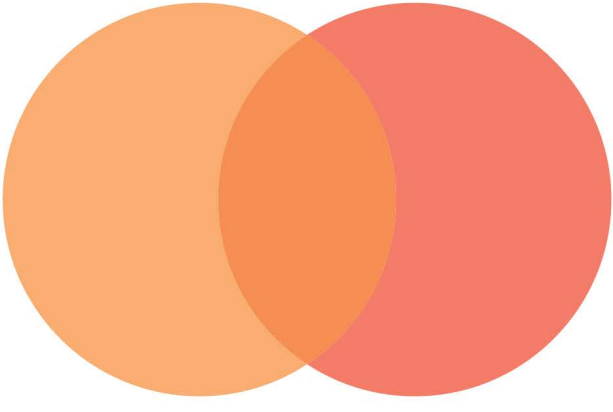
PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

for Christian English Teachers

how to be a TEACHER *with* CONVICTIONS
while RESPECTING *those of your* STUDENTS



Kitty Barnhouse Purgason

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Professional Guidelines for Christian English Teachers: How to Be a Teacher with Convictions While Respecting Those of Your Students

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INTRODUCTION

Mei had been to the Urbana missions conference as a junior at a state university where she had majored in English and public policy. She was thrilled to be accepted as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Kazakhstan, where she was spending a year after graduation. She cared about missions and hoped she would have some positive impact for Christ, but she was also conscious of her role as a representative and employee of the US government, so she avoided talking about anything related to religion. At the same time, she began to realize that her resource materials from the US included values such as human rights, women's rights, the environment, and civic education. She wondered how teaching this content differed from teaching the values and truth that she cared about as a follower of Jesus.

Ann, a Christian ministries major from a US Bible college, loved being a missionary in Cluj, Romania, teaching EFL. Students of all ages flocked to the center where she and her teammates taught conversational English and led Bible studies in English. She felt that she was meeting a genuine need as students told her how important English was for their study and jobs. However, when students asked her grammar questions or requested help with IELTS test preparation, and when she compared what their center was offering with what other English language programs in their city offered, she wondered whether they were really doing a good job or whether students were just coming because classes were free.

Jordan is an ESL teacher in an intensive English program at a university in Kansas, with students from all over the world.

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He recently took the class Perspectives on the World Christian Movement and began wondering how he could be part of God's global purposes. His church sponsors volunteer-taught conversational English classes, and he hoped that inviting his students to them would do it. After all, he has lots of students from China studying business and students from Saudi Arabia in engineering. It would be wonderful to connect those students with his church. However, the only students who have come to the classes have been Christians from Korea, Mexico, and Ghana.

Andre just got a nice severance package when the company where he worked as a computer programmer went through some changes. He thought he'd try something new for a year before looking for another job—and ended up in Korea as an English teacher. "I'm not a missionary; I'm not really into evangelism. I just want to live as a Christian and give God glory in what I do," he says.

This book is for Mei, Ann, Jordan, Andre, and teachers like them. It is for people who are looking for ways to be effective Christian English teachers—effective both in their professional lives and as Christians. But before we look at how Christian English teachers can do this, it's helpful to examine some recent history.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Since the early 1980s, Christian English teachers (CETs) have recognized that the world's hunger for English language instruction offers them an opportunity to teach more than English. A number of organizations were formed to this end. ELIC, committed to sending Christian English teachers to China and elsewhere, was founded in 1981, the same year that saw the birth of ESEC. ERRC followed in 1986. In 1992 *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* published "Teaching English Feeds a Worldwide Craving." The director of an evangelistic conversational English program wrote in 1993, "There are simply more people interested in learning English than there are people interested in learning about God. Therefore, you offer them

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what they want and package it in such a way that they get more than what they expect." A handbook for current and future missionaries published in 1997 includes articles titled or subtitled "Use Your Native Tongue as an Evangelistic Tool," "English Opens Doors," and "English May Develop an Interest in Christ." "Teaching English May Well Be the 21st Century's Most Promising Way to Take the Gospel to the World" was the subtitle for a *Christianity Today* cover story in 2002.

But soon CETs began facing a backlash from their secular counterparts, forcing them to examine issues such as transparency and professionalism. "Imperial Troopers and Servants of the Lord," published in 2003 in the main professional journal for the field of TESOL, sounded the alarm. In that article, the author expresses distress that the field of English language teaching may now be tainted by the "material and spiritual aspects of imperial acquisitiveness" associated with the American invasion of Iraq and covert evangelism done by Christian EFL teachers. An article in a lesser-known journal, but by a scholar known for his work on imperialism and language teaching, examined in disapproving detail the scale and cultural politics of those "teaching English as a missionary language." He decries covert agendas, inadequate teacher training, connections between Christian missionaries and particular views of money and politics, and the lack of adequate ethics.

At the same time, Christians began to articulate ways to be a Christian working with integrity and respect in an intercultural context. Smith and Carvill wrote in 2000 *The Gift of the Stranger*, looking at foreign language education in general. A key work in 2001 was Don Snow's *English Teaching as Christian Mission*. This well-respected and widely read book describes how CETs can engage in witness through both language learning and teaching. Snow elaborates how teaching can be not only witness but also ministry and service. Chapters on English teachers as peacemakers and agents of reconciliation between churches round out his views on the special role of CETs.

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Recent publications have further explored being a CET with a strong vocation to integrate faith and job. *Christian and Critical English Language Educators in Dialogue* includes articles by both Christians and others, shifting the tone from the somewhat acrimonious one of the articles earlier in the decade to a more respectful exchange of views. *Christian Faith and English Language Teaching and Learning*, from the same publisher, presents empirical research about Christian teachers and programs. Jan Dormer's *Teaching English in Missions: Effectiveness and Integrity* is a more practical book designed for mission-committed individuals and organizations. I highly recommend it as a companion book to this one.

PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

Teachers may wonder if any professional guidelines exist to guide CETs in their activities. The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief wrote ground rules for missionary activities in 2009. Another set of recommendations, "Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World," was published in 2011 by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

The First Amendment Center, with support from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups, as well as education groups like the PTA and the American Federation of Teachers, wrote *The Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*. This guide says that "public-school teachers are required by the First Amendment to teach about religion fairly and objectively, neither promoting nor denigrating religion in general or specific religious groups in particular." It distinguishes between *exposing* students to religious views and *imposing* a particular viewpoint, between *informing* students about beliefs and seeking to *conform* students to a particular belief, and between *teaching about* religious holidays and *celebrating* a particular holiday.

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Thiessen's work on the ethics of evangelism and on what he calls "teaching from and for commitment" is also relevant. Among his points are:

- Protect the dignity and worth of others—they are not merely objects of proselytizing
- Care for the needs of the whole person—physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual
- Allow freedom for the other to make a choice; avoid coercion
- Avoid psychological manipulation, especially when dealing with the young, the vulnerable, or people facing personal crises
- Don't exploit power imbalances
- Be truthful, without deception or hidden agendas
- Be humble—not arrogant, condescending, or dogmatic
- Love and respect those with different opinions
- Respect the other's identity, including their family, community, and religious or non-religious affiliation

There have been some general attempts at codifying ethical behavior in TESOL, especially for foreigners working abroad, and TESOL professionals sometimes refer to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, unlike some fields, TESOL does not have a statement of professional ethics. In his new edition of a widely used methodology book, H. Douglas Brown offers three principles for "teaching with social responsibility": (1) "Give students opportunities to learn about important social, moral, or ethical issues and to analyze all sides of an issue." (2) "Create an atmosphere of respect for each other's opinions, beliefs, and ethnic or cultural diversity." (3) "Maintain a threshold of morality and ethics in the classroom climate." But what exactly does that look like?

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