



Gaza, Credit MECC

'If only...' Thoughts on an unfolding tragedy in Gaza

Rev Dr Keith Rowe

I have been asked to reflect on recent tragic and violent events in Palestine/Israel. Even as I write my thoughts are still being clarified. I have strongly held opinions about the recent history of Palestine/Israel, but the tragedy currently unfolding in that place raises deeper questions than can be resolved by standard arguments. Foundational questions are posed afresh: Can humanity control its tendency towards violence? Is it possible to live in peace with neighbours who live and believe differently? Can we escape from humanity's tragic desire to possess what is valued by others?

The words of a statement in an American Jewish magazine, *Tikkun*, a few days after the Hamas attack caught my attention: "It is only by recognising our shared fears and our shared tears that we will find our way through this nightmare.... This moment calls us to slow down, sit with the pain and complexity, and grapple with our discomfort. It is a moment for digging deep, seeing across differences, and remembering our deep yearning for peace and justice."

It's as though a scientist without moral compass resolved to test the limits of human compassion. He took a small container and in it he placed two related families. Then he poured into the container a mix of good intentions and demonic possibilities. He left it all to ripen in the warm Palestinian sun. Soon the families were swimming in a container filled with greed, fear, distrust, patriotic fervour, impossible hopes and an insatiable desire for revenge when wronged. For good measure he sprinkled his toxic mix with strong doses of twentieth century colonialism and of religion redesigned to justify human greed. A generous sprinkling of great power rivalry and imperial ambition and to top it all off, an irrational belief that it's possible to build peace through violent means. The result was predictable.

On 14 May 1948, while the United Nations was still discussing a proposal to establish a Jewish state on Palestinian territory and alongside a Palestinian state, Ben Gurion, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, with himself as the first President. It was a time of jubilation for European Jewish communities bruised by the horrors of the Nazi sponsored holocaust. They would have their own nation and be free to be themselves, to make their own laws, to express their faith without being surrounded by antisemitic prejudice. On that same day Palestinians and citizens of surrounding Arab nations were fearful and strongly opposed the establishment of the new state on land belonging to another people.

The story that unfolded is a tragedy made up of a long list of 'If only ...' still born possibilities and wrong turnings.

- If only, there had been meaningful consultation with Palestinian people when the idea of an Israeli state was first proposed ...
- If only, earlier Jewish settlers in Palestine had respected the land and livelihood of the indigenous people, if Palestinians had not been dispossessed of their lands, their villages destroyed, their people scattered ...
- If only, Palestinian land had not continued to be stolen and Jewish settlements built on it ...



- If only, the founders of Zionism (a form of assertive Judaism) had heeded the warnings of Jewish intellectuals like Martin Buber who feared the new nation might descend into a form of nationalism that would obscure the ancient promise of being a people through whom humanity would be blessed ...
- If only, there had been a Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, a Nelson Mandela, to lead non-violent Palestinian opposition to what was happening ...
- If only, Palestinian leaders had been able to resist the help and advice of militant forms of Islam ...
- If only, the USA, Britain, and other western nations had not manipulated events to serve their political, economic and military advantage ...
- If only, armament manufacturers had not so readily provided weapons to those caught up in a mounting spiral of violence ...

The list of 'if only ...' could go on and on. Today's tragedies are the products of choices made without sensitivity to future consequences. They are memories that imprison good people in a cycle of violence from which they feel unable to escape. We cannot change past events but perhaps we can rob them of their power to damage the present. Is it possible for nations to repent, turn and face a new direction, to claim a new beginning? If only ...

As I think and pray my way into today's pain in Gaza and throughout Palestine/Israel I am aware that on 5 November 1881, a colonial force invaded and destroyed the Māori village of Parihaka in western Taranaki. The village was a centre of non-violent opposition to settler confiscation of Māori land. The dynamics of Parihaka have rough parallels with what has unfolded in Palestine over the same 140 years – colonial ambition, disregard of the rights and dignity of tangata whenua, morality derailed by human greed. The details differ and the scale of the destruction in and around Gaza is greater, but the two events seem to me to be on the same page. The great difference is that the people of Parihaka and their leaders refused to meet violence with violence, to perpetuate a cycle of violence. If only ...

The land and people of Palestine have witnessed some of the most heinous of crimes against humanity – tossed about by successive imperial powers and ravaged by the fury of Crusader warriors. But across the centuries Palestine has also been home to spiritual insights with the potential to reshape humanity, to jolt us into new ways of living. The love-soaked teaching of Jesus was first heard and heeded in this place. Muslims recognise Jerusalem as a place uniquely touched by Allah, the compassionate and merciful creator. The story of Moses who experienced God as Holy Presence who hears and feels the pain of the oppressed has a treasured place within Judaism. Celtic Christians speak of 'thin places' – places where the holy presence is most deeply felt. Surely Palestine is historically such a place.

In 2008 I attended a meeting in Jerusalem of the International Council of Christians and Jews. The theme was peacemaking. I was impressed by an address by Rabbi Ron Kronish, founder and director of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel. He expressed his continuing disappointment that the peace-loving wisdom of the faiths in the land was disregarded by those negotiating for peace. I wonder, can the words of Micah be given a place at the negotiating table: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God ... beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks ... so all shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees. 'If only ...



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Putting Out the Welcome Mat

Rev Janet Marsh

In January this year, 15 Turkish refugee families including adults and children of all ages, came together in Motueka in a spirit of friendship to spend four days with members of St Andrew's Motueka Uniting Church. The 60 visiting guests, recently arrived from Turkey, came from their new homes in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

The Pearl of the Islands Foundation (PIF) sponsored travel costs and the local Motueka business community supported the initiative with goods, vouchers, entry passes and resources to ensure the guests and their hosts could visit and experience many of the region's attractions and activities.

The visiting families were warmly welcomed, each visiting family staying in a local family's house. Muslim and Christian families experienced and learned about each other's food, faith and culture. Each evening the entire group gathered at the St Andrew's church hall where they shared dinner dishes prepared by the group, followed by music and entertainment.

Rev Janet Marsh, presbyter at St Andrew's and driving force behind the initiative, said the visit - the first of its kind in New Zealand - was a rewarding and enriching experience for everyone involved. "In today's world where there is so much division, it is a vital step to make a difference and build on our common bonds."

Feedback from all the parties involved was universally positive as they celebrated the rare opportunity to come together in a project thought to be the first of its kind in Aotearoa. One refugee commented, "It felt like one big family, like gaining new brothers and sisters, even new grandchildren and grandparents."

The Pearl of Islands Foundation fosters understanding and acceptance between people of diverse communities through meaningful engagement and intercultural events. Working alongside many partners including government agencies, religious, educational, health and wellbeing, cultural and interfaith groups, they promote and celebrate diversity and advance social cohesion.

In late September Pearl of the Islands Foundation received one of five ChangeMakers Awards for The Welcome Mat at the for a People's Choice Sustainable development goals award 2023, at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 78th Session in New York.



Methodist Catholic Joint Service of Repentance and Reconciliation

Rev Dr Trevor Hoggard

On Wednesday 25 October, 80 people attended a joint Methodist and Catholic service held at Takapuna Methodist Church, Auckland. The service followed a liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation prepared by the Methodist Catholic International Dialogue Commission to accompany its most recent report, *God in Christ Reconciling*. The service offered an opportunity to repent on past and ongoing divisions and to celebrate how far we have travelled together in ecumenical friendship.

Ecumenism has slipped off the radar for many, but Christ's prayer that we should be one compels us to continue our efforts to deepen our friendship, wrestle with differences of liturgical and theological understandings and explore further avenues for future co-operation.

Rev Dr Trevor Hoggard is Co-convenor of the Methodist Catholic Dialogue committee and a former member of the Methodist Catholic International Commission 2011-2021.



Conference 2023 Update

Ady Shannon

Over the past several months General Secretary Rev Tara Tautari and her personal assistant Lucille Havenga, ably supported by a large team of tech savvy volunteers, and a dedicated organisational committee, have been busy preparing for the online Conference 2023.

Scheduled to take place from Tuesday 7 November to Saturday 11 November, a core team will gather at the Hastings Wesley Community Centre and connect online with the xxx delegates registered for the event.

MCNZ President Rev Peter Taylor has drawn on a verse from Romans 15-13 to inspire the theme of this year's Conference, God our Source of Hope. In a message to delegates, he elaborated on his hopes for Conference 2023.

"Faith, hope, love – these three remain, but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13.13). Faith is our foundation, and love is our action, but so often hope gets squeezed out of our journey with God. It is time to put this right. If we have lost our hope we have become estranged from God, from each other and from our world.

Hope does not look to ourselves, our church, our systems or traditions, but to God alone. Hope is not optimism nor is it based on the progress of humanity. Hope begins with looking back at what God has done in the past (and thus links with last year's Conference theme - He hokinga mahara. He haere whakamua. Reflecting on our past and moving forward).

Hope then sees the present with all its contradictions and injustices. But Hope also glimpses the better realities promised by God's future. It is this Hope that impels us forward as a church.

I call upon Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, the Methodist Church of New Zealand, to grasp not just our foundation in faith, and our activity of love, but also this hope that will drive us forward."

Rev Tara Tautari reiterated the call for prayers from the wider connexion to ensure consensus decisions are reached with consideration, and discernment and that the outcomes from Conference contribute to the work and mission of MCNZ in Aotearoa and beyond. There are two key areas that will be discussed over the course of five days of prerecorded presentations, worship, reflection, reports and discussions.

The first major focus will be reflecting on findings from the first year of the decade of climate justice, titled Rekindle the Vā of Papatuānuku. A highlight will be the launch of new online and printed ministry resources by Rev Siosifa Pole, chair of the Climate Justice Working Group.

At Conference last year it was decided that a review of Mission Resourcing would be undertaken. Much effort has gone into extensive consultation with the wider Connexion to determine a path forward. The results of those discussions and recommendations will be presented to Conference.

As we gather next week to debate, discern and determine the direction of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, we welcome your prayers as we look forward, and back, with hope, love and faith.

All services will be live-streamed and links will be available to view the ceremonies at any time. There is no requirement to register to view the services. For up to date Conference information and links to the services, check the MCNZ website.

A full report on the outcomes and decisions of Conference will be included in the December issue of Touchstone.



He Inoi Mo Te Tumuaki Hou

Marama Hotere

The historic induction service of the new Tumuaki for Te Taha Māori, Rev. Dr Arapera Ngaha was held at Whakatuora centre on the evening of 24 October. The opening prayer is a blessing for the new Te Taha Māori leadership from Tira Toki – Mema o Te Rohe o Te Waipounamu.

Mauri Tū, Mauri Ora ki a koe me tōu katoa i tēnei pō whakamīharo, whakamana mōu e taku Whaea. Ina koe ka tū hei Pou whakairiora i te iwi, koia nei ko koe ka whakanuihia. Whai ra koe i te huarahi kua whakatūwhera mōu i roto i ngā ringa kaha o Te Atua, tū mai koe he Maunga whakahī hei hīkoitanga mo tōu iwi, whakapāoho atu te kupu ki te minenga kua noho mai ki mua i a koe hei oranga mo tōu ao, mo te ao kei tua i a tāua. Noho mai koe he kanohi kitea.

Koia nei tētahi o ngā manotini e mihi kau ana ki a koe i tēnei rā. Whai i tēnei mahi kua mo tōu iwi e taku Whaea, me maumahara hoki koe ki tōu katoa hoki. Arohanui rawa mutungakore ki a koe e taku Whaea.

The evening liturgy opened with the words from Proverbs 18: 15: "An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." These words characterise the hope promised in the gift of ministry leadership. As people engaged in church leadership we are always striving to make wise decisions with an open mind and heart for all.

On behalf of our Te Taha Māori whānau I offer my sincere thanks to the members of the church, those who travelled from the South Island and from the Far North to attend this momentous event in the life of Te Taha Māori. It was truly a blessed celebration to receive the Hāhi whānau who gave of their time to spend an evening with us. Our whānau were honoured to welcome you all into our whare Whakatuora in Tamaki rohe. We acknowledge with gratitude all members of the church who were unable to attend the celebration, and those who sent their messages of congratulations. Many thanks to Michael Lemanu, Paula Moala and Felonitesi Manukia for providing the livestream at short notice.

During the church service Vice President TeRito Peyroux-Semu shared from Isaiah 40: 1-9 and spoke of leadership as "comfort", one who strengthens and enables others to stand strong in their faith. This comfort is the hope we share for all who follow the way of Christ, to find that which sustains and keeps us true to our calling and path. Especially in these times of uncertainty when there is much division in the world.

The church service was followed with greetings by the wider connexion. Synod representation, Trinity College, and Mission Resourcing brought their gifts and well wishes. These are the blessings that belonging to a connexional church brings us. Those present reflected on the people who have also provided leadership for our church in the past. People spoke of Arapera's many years of committed service on different boards and committees of our church, and many spoke about the challenge and responsibility of connexional leadership.

We acknowledge with thanks the support and blessings for Arapera her whānau and Te Taha Māori as she undertakes this new ministry for the church. Whakawhetai ki te Atua.



Voices Matter

Rev Dr Jione Havea

October 14, 2023, was a troubling day across the Tasman Sea. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the general election saw fewer Members of Parliament (than in the previous election) with and from Pasifika heritage. At the time of writing, there is one Pasifika elected MP within the National Party – to be confirmed after the count of special votes.

What does the result of the general election mean for the interests of Pasifika people? Of course, one does not have to be of Pasifika heritage to understand and speak for Pasifika people. But to understand and to speak requires listening and hearing first, and there are so many voices and so much diversity across Pasifika communities. There are also many obstacles against hearing – including the arrogance of supremacism and the temptation to patronize.

On the same date, 14 October 2023, in Australia, the Voice Referendum – inspired by the Uluru Statement of the Heart – was knocked back, insulted and humiliated. The Australian Constitution is not to be amended, and the status quo remains. The voices of Indigenous Australia(ns) are shut out from the eyes of the Constitution and from the opportunity to be legally gathered and protected. They have gathered for thousands of years, including at the event that produced the Uluru Statement of the Heart, but without the sanction and support of the so-called commonwealth government.

How might we in Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa respond to the shushing events of 14 October 2023?

See: we need to see beyond the limits of our churches – that is, beyond the agendas and the spaces of our churches. What is happening in public places? This set of questions may be raised to both the NZ general election and the Australian Voice Referendum. The questions invite us into public places where we see and position ourselves in political struggles.

Judge: Did the result of the NZ general election reflect the kind of society that Te Hāhi Weteriana advocates? What did we – in Methodist households – do to make that society possible in and through the general election? It is easy to judge political parties, politicians and voters, but to excuse church members on the premise that churches stay out of politics and manoeuvres of the state. But churches operate within the arms of the state and the laws of the land. We should therefore be concerned with the selection of voices to our parliaments and into the Constitution (written and unwritten).

Act: What are we to do then?

John Wesley is reported to have seen, judged, and acted as if the world was his parish. Should we appropriate Wesley's mission? There are dangers with Wesley's view, if one takes it to mean that we should convert the world. Similarly, there are dangers with the great commission in Matthew 28: 16–20, and with the Doctrine of Discovery that inspired the colonial project. Nonetheless, there can be social and political benefits in Wesley's view. For instance, 'parish' refers to a community, a gathering, in which one serves and collaborates. When people see and judge that public places are their parish, then they will act as servers and collaborators.

When people see beyond the borders of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, they will judge and act in solidarity with voices that are suppressed, from West Papua to Myanmar, to Gaza, to Ukraine, to Tigray, to Uganda, to South Sudan ... and in between and around.

When people see and judge that earth, sea, sky and underworld are their parish, then they will do responsible acts that promote their—earth, sea, sky, underworld, with their energies and cohorts—wellbeing.



Australian Referendum Result a Cause for Lament

Rev Sharon Hollis President Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

Unlike most other colonised countries Australia has never formally recognised the Indigenous People who have lived in these lands since creation, nor made treaties or other agreements. The outcome of a recent government referendum to recognise

Indigenous People by enshrining an advisory voice (The Voice) to Parliament in the Australian Constitution has been overwhelmingly rejected.

Since the arrival of colonisers Indigenous People have asserted their sovereignty, petitioned for self-determination, sought ways to be part of government and advocated for meaningful recognition.

In 2017 after an extensive consultation process designed to determine how Indigenous People would like to address the lack of recognition issued the Uluru Statement from the Heart (View The Statement - Uluru Statement from the Heart) to the Australian People. The Statement called for Voice, Treaty and Truth as the way to recognise Indigenous People and address the systemic injustice of Indigenous People in Australia, seen in their over-representation in the justice system, poorer health outcomes, and shorter life expectancy than the rest of Australia.

The Uniting Church supported the Uluru Statement in full as an expression of our desire to heal the wounds of colonisation and address the structural disadvantage of Indigenous People in their own lands. The Uniting Church has formally recognised that 'the First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways' through a Preamble to our Constitution (<https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/128>). This preamble has guided our theology of sovereignty, truth telling and justice seeking. The Uniting Church also has a covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

The government called a referendum to recognise Indigenous People by enshrining an advisory voice (The Voice) to Parliament in the Australian Constitution. This referendum was held on 14 October 2023. The Uniting Church supported a Yes vote in the referendum after consultation with the UAICC, the Indigenous body in the Uniting Church. It takes a lead on ministry with Indigenous people and on Uniting Church positions in relation to Indigenous people.

The Assembly invited the whole Uniting Church to see the referendum as a challenge to reflect further on our own relationships with First Peoples within and outside the Church including how well we honoured the Covenant with UAICC. These decisions were made after discussion with UAICC and with their full support and cooperation.

The referendum was overwhelmingly defeated, with a majority of Australians in all states voting against the Voice.

After the loss of the referendum many Indigenous groups and people who campaigned for the Voice asked for a week of silence to reflect and mourn. As Christians we lament the grief and sorrow of most Indigenous people at the result, and we wait. What is clear is that reconciliation as a concept is broken in Australia.

The Uniting Church remains committed to its covenant with UAICC and to strengthening the Covenant. It is imperative if we are to have any integrity as a church seeking to exercise ministry and mission in these lands now called Australia. We remain committed to honouring the sovereignty of Indigenous People in Australia and being part of the movement that seeks justice for First Nations people in Australia. First Nations justice will continue to be a key area of advocacy for the Uniting Church, guided by Congress.



Climate-Induced Migration and Methodist Commitment

Elisapesi Havea

Dr 'Elisapesi Hepi Havea represented the Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa at the World Methodist Council Consultation on Migration in Manila, Philippines from September 4-7, 2023. She shares insights from the event that included delegates from Methodist churches and organisations worldwide.

The purpose of the event was to delve into the intricate matter of migration and how, as members of the Methodist church, we can collaborate effectively in solidarity to address the associated challenges. The overarching theme of this consultation was "On the Move," building upon the foundation laid by the inaugural Consultation on Migration in London, England in 2019 and the resulting declaration titled "God Is On The Move: A Call to Be the Church in a New Way - World Methodist Council."

The Manila Consultation was deeply rooted in theological principles of love for migrants and welcoming one another, as expressed in Leviticus 19: 34 and Matthew 25: 35. Additionally, it drew inspiration from John Wesley's example of intentional presence within marginalised communities.

I had the privilege of delivering a presentation that centered on climate-induced migration, with a specific focus on the Pacific region. The presentation illuminated the dedication of the Methodist Church of New Zealand in addressing climate change. This contribution was of significant importance, given that I was one of just two delegates from the Pacific region. The Secretary General of the Samoan Methodist Church and I were the only participants who presented on issues pertaining to climate change.

My presentation addressed the ramifications of climate change and shed light on the proactive initiatives undertaken by the Methodist Church of New Zealand. I emphasised the ongoing endeavours of the Climate Justice Working Group within the church, actively engaged in formulating a policy to address climate-induced migration. The objective of this policy is to prompt the Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa to formally acknowledge climate-induced migration as a matter of climate justice. Additionally, it aims to advocate with the New Zealand government for the establishment of legal migration pathways, specifically through the issuing of access category visas tailored to the needs of Pacific individuals who face the prospect of climate-induced displacement.

One noteworthy initiative that I emphasised during my presentation pertains to the "Decade of Climate Justice" (2023-2033), titled 'Rekindle the Vā of Papatuānuku.'

My presentation stood out for its distinctive approach, as it wove together the narratives and first-hand experiences of Pacific people who are already confronting the stark challenges posed by climate change. Through the sharing of their personal stories and apprehensions, the presentation served as a revelation, emphasising the urgent imperative to address climate change in the context of migration.

The consultation recognised the urgency of the climate crisis and, as a result, issued a vital declaration and commitment. This declaration urges all churches to assume their responsibility regarding the climate crisis. It emphasises the importance of paying particular attention to enforced displacement from climate-threatened nations in the Pacific and low-lying regions across the globe. It calls on churches from the global north to take proactive steps, including:

1. Rapid Reduction of Carbon Emissions: Churches are urged to do everything within their power to swiftly reduce carbon emissions.

2. Demanding Government Action: Churches are encouraged to demand immediate action from their governments to address climate change.
3. Development of Climate-Related Categories of Asylum: There is an insistence that governments create climate-related categories of asylum to address the needs of those displaced by climate change.
4. Reviving the Calling as Co-Caretakers of Creation: Churches are called upon to re-embrace their role as co-caretakers of creation, aligning with a more sustainable and responsible approach towards the environment.

The presentation not only highlighted the impacts of climate-induced migration but also played a pivotal role in drawing attention to climate change as an integral part of the consultation's discussions on migration. This declaration underscores the commitment of the Methodist Church and the global Methodist community to address the climate crisis and its consequences for displaced populations, particularly in the Pacific and other vulnerable regions.

I'd like to conclude this article by expressing my heartfelt gratitude, saying "Mālō 'aupito" (Thank you very much) to the Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa for granting me the opportunity to participate in the Manila Consultation. As a member of the Climate Justice Working Group, attending this consultation has been an invaluable learning experience. It has opened my eyes to essential information that is extremely pertinent to our work on climate-induced migration policies.



REFLECTIONS

Seeing as we are.

Rev Andrew Doubleday, UCANZ Ministry Facilitator

It's often easy to see the faults in others without recognising our own. We imagine that our case is special, requiring a dispensation, a measure of grace, that we would not make available to others should 'the shoe be on the other foot'.

The current horror between the Israelis and Hamas allows us to see what a religious war looks like when the participants have retreated from any sense of either seeking to understand the other. Each has withdrawn to their corner, each painting themselves to all who will listen as the true victim. Neither is willing to acknowledge that the other has a story that needs to be both told and heard. Neither is willing to recognise, confess and seek forgiveness and restoration for their own culpability.

I cannot accept that zero-sum thinking is the only way that matters of conflict, even on such a massive scale, can be resolved. Having to win, which infers meaning the other needs to lose, can only 'reverberate through the generations' - creating an ongoing cycle of victimhood and retribution. Sometimes it appears that only by making the other truly suffer can one expect to feel truly vindicated.

This is not the way of Jesus. This is not the way of the best of either the Old or New Testaments of our treasured scriptures.

Jonah is filled with rage against that barbaric people, the Assyrians. He cannot countenance the possibility of the grace of God being extended toward them. All he wants is for them to suffer - the more, the better.

The last verse of that amazing book is filled with pathos. As God remonstrates with Jonah's need to see the people of Nineveh annihilated, God gently pushes back with the most unwelcome expression of grace: "Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jon. 4:11).

What Jonah sees as pure premeditated malice and evil on the part of the Assyrians, God sees as lostness and confusion. Oh, that we might see 'the other' through the eyes of God.



Jesus – King of the Comebacks

Joshua Robertson, President NZLPA

Growing up in a big extended Pasifika family and having a large network of relatives, friends and people who were connected via church, sports teams, friends of friends, cousins of cousins, neighbours etc. meant there was never ever a shortage of jokes and laughter.

If you put a foot wrong in dance practice, if you mispronounced a word when reciting your memory verse at church, if you turned up to rugby training with a funny haircut or if you wore some weird item of clothing to school forced upon you by your aunty who bought it just for you on her recent trip to Samoa ... sure enough you would be surrounded by a multitude of onlookers armed with cheeky grins, ready to launch a flurry of jokes and mockery in your direction!

However, if you were capable of defending yourself with some quick witted responsive banter aka a good "comeback", then you'd be able to diffuse the situation fairly promptly and others would know to think twice before trying to attack you again in the future.

In my opinion, Jesus was the "King of Comebacks." When I think of the many stories of how Jesus was under attack from various people in society at the time, I am in awe of his ability to send his would-be attackers packing with their tails between their legs.

One such comeback that stands out is from Matthew 22:15 – 21 (New International Version):

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax[a] to Caesar or not?"

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

21 "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

This was just another example of Pharisees trying to trap Jesus by asking him a tricky question in the hope that they could then justify bringing charges against him. They were hoping that Jesus might somehow express support for paying taxes to the pagan Roman empire and in doing so upset all his followers who would then lose faith in him, OR that Jesus might speak against paying taxes to the Roman authority and then be seen as being rebellious and therefore liable to be charged accordingly. He is between a rock and a hard place, a lose-lose situation but then he comes up with a comeback so amazing that they are left speechless "... give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

There are many other instances in the bible where we read of other incredible Christ comebacks. And of course we all wait in faith and hope for his ultimate comeback of all – his second coming! God bless.



A Whirl of Activity in Palmerston North

Ady Shannon



Shortly after Rik TeTau, Ngati Kahunganunu, took on the role as General Manager of the Palmerston North Methodist Social Services PNMSS, we interviewed him for the July 2022 issue of Touchstone. At that time, he said he was “looking for a challenge in an environment that truly cared and supported community and each other.” Since that interview, Rik and his team – 11 paid staff and 13 volunteers - have had a major impact on the local community with a range of increased and enhanced

social services, including a social supermarket that is helping to fill pantries and restoring the mana of the many working families who are registering to visit.

Rik says his team cannot keep up with the extraordinary success of the social supermarket. There are currently 75 families and individuals enrolled for the service with bookings in place until well into 2024. “We could do more, but we don’t have the capacity or resource,” Rik says. The service differs from a foodbank as users choose their purchases based on their personal circumstances and preferences, and they make a financial contribution to offset the costs of the products selected. Users shop privately and with dignity as they select groceries from premises that resembles a regular supermarket.

Rik first saw the concept rolled out in Sydney some years ago and responded when the opportunity arose last year to roll out the venture in Palmerston North. In a deal negotiated with Foodstuffs, the shelves are stocked with a wide variety of products purchased at a discounted price. Registered users are allocated points depending on the number of people in the household they are supporting, and they make a financial contribution to offset the costs to PNMSS.

Rik says the feedback has been amazing. “People come in with big smiles. This is mana-enhancing for people as they don’t have to beg.” He admits to being proud of, and humbled by the success of the service that is equally popular with his staff, volunteers and the community using the service. Registered users typically call in once a month although large households may split their points allocations and visit twice a month depending on the volume of food required. Registration is a deliberately uncomplicated process. “Nothing drilling,” Rik says.

Rik says they are seeing many new clients who are different to the people who depend on foodbank services. “We are seeing a move away from families who live on benefits. We are seeing working families and 90 percent are new clients. The cost-of-living crisis is hurting everyone.” A ‘recipe club’ initiative is popular and helps with meal planning as ingredients for a meal and a recipe are provided in exchange for points.

Beyond the social supermarket, a kai box is available for anyone passing and payment is by koha. “Some people give our staff a hug, someone else might offer to vacuum the floor or clean the toilet. We don’t allocate the food that is available in the kai box. People just pick what they want, and others bring contributions. People using the service are also supporting the service.”

In the whanau room, food is available for everyone visiting. Many people arrive with food to share, including social supermarket users who want to show their gratitude by contributing to others.

Now that the social supermarket is operating so successfully, Rik is eyeing new initiatives although he concedes his team might benefit from a break. “It’s been a bit of a tornado since I arrived. My excitement comes from setting something up. Once it’s up and running, I look for something new.”



New NZMWF President and National Executive 2023 to 2025

Tui Salevoa



NZ Methodist Women's Fellowship gathered in person for their biennial Convention at the Sudima Hotel, Auckland from 12 to 15 October 2023. Along with business talk, the weekend was full of laughter, dancing, and fellowship as 96 members celebrated

having the first opportunity since Covid-19 to meet in person. Tuituivao (Tui) S Salevao, ex NZMWF President 2021 to 2023 reports on the event.

In my October article I said it was the last time you would hear from me, but it felt unjust to get President Lesieli Pope to complete an article just days after taking over the helm.

Convention was held at Sudima Hotel and at the final church service on Sunday at Panmure Methodist Church - where I worship - we commissioned our new President and her National Executive. Our theme for the weekend was Revive and Unite – Go bear Fruits, fruits that will last John 15 vs 16.

TBC

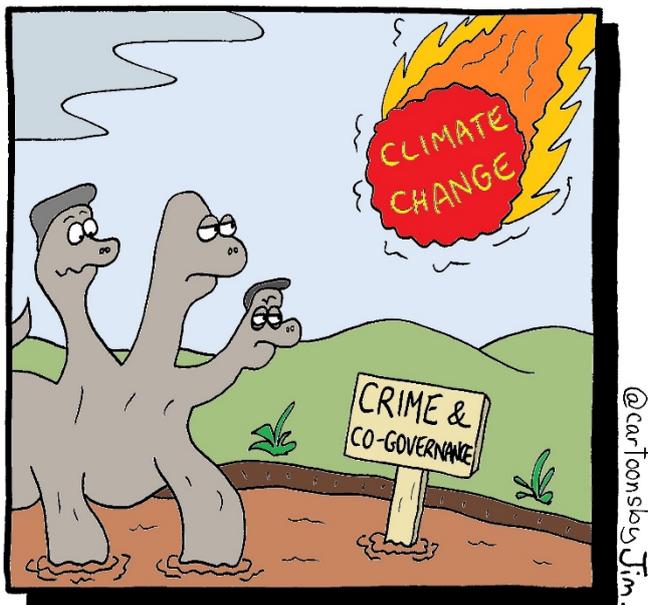
My team had an awesome time; perhaps it was because it was our last official weekend in the roles. We had great fun as we celebrated the change and friendship that has evolved since we came together two years ago. We started as friends and now consider ourselves a sisterhood that we will cherish for life.

NZMWF is an awesome organisation with passionate members that love to help people in need. We wish President Lesieli Pope all the best in her two-year term.

For information on the work the NZMWF do, check our page on the MCNZ website or ask any women in your church who are members to explain what they do.

Next month our new National Executive will report on the work they are planning and the flavour they will bring to their roles.

Signing out for real - Tofa Soifua ma ia manuia.



Jim's Cartoon

Brendan Boughen



Credit DSPR Jordan

Give Gifts of Love

Gillian Southey CWS

Finding the right gift is always a challenge, but one that Christian World Service has covered. Their popular range of gifts is full of surprises and big gifts that don't cost the earth. One of the gifts that has remained near the top of the sales chart is Baby and Mother Health. Buying this gift acts as a donation to the Well Baby programme in Jordan, primarily helping Palestinian mothers and the children under six who live in the nearby camp.

Gifted offers 24 meaningful gifts that help families like Ruqaya's meet their urgent needs and create new opportunities. CWS will send you a card or e-card to give to family or friends. Order by phone 0800 74 73 72.



Credit DSPR

The Face of Gaza has Changed

Gillian Southey CWS

Days after the Hamas attack on Israel triggered airstrikes and the threat of a ground offensive, residents of Gaza are facing unbelievable destruction.

Thousands of people have been killed, injured and displaced and nearly 200 people are being held as hostages. Medical facilities including the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, schools and

homes have been damaged or destroyed. The need for an urgent ceasefire and humanitarian relief is undisputable.

Christian World Service is appealing for donations to help our partner, the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) respond as soon as conditions allow. It is preparing to help many more people with food, hygiene kits, shelter, medications and medical treatment, and psychosocial support.

DSPR Gaza will resume operations as soon as possible. It runs three health clinics, vocational training programmes, and provides emergency assistance to Palestinians regardless of their religious affiliation. The main office was severely damaged by air strikes. The Shijaya Health Clinic was also damaged and the hall used for children's activities totally burned. In late October there was no news from offices in Darraj and it was too dangerous to open in Rafah. Staff have lost homes and family members.

"They have changed the face of Gaza, you can't recognise the locations and you feel that this is a strange place, as if you had never been there," exclaimed one DSPR Gaza staff member. While media attention is focusing on Gaza, DSPR Executive Secretary Nader Abu Amsha says the conflict in the West Bank is intensifying with more arrests and violence.

"It's an extremely difficult time in Gaza. Our colleagues in Gaza keep telling us to pray for their safety and the safety of all people in Gaza. They have lost hope in politicians and governments," he laments.

Donations to the Gaza Palestine Emergency Appeal can be made at cws.org.nz or by calling 0800 74 73 72.



Celebrating Presbyterian Women

Rachel Hurd, Archivist, Presbyterian Research Centre (Archives)

On the evening of Thursday 28 September 2023, Rt. Rev. Rose Luxford, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, led a farewell devotion to celebrate the work of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand, (PWANZ) and to acknowledge its role within the life and history of the Church.

Earlier in the day the General Assembly formally passed a resolution acknowledging the winding up of PWANZ after 118 years.

As part of this celebration the Archives produced a short visual presentation to provide a snapshot of the history of PWANZ from its first beginnings as the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU) in 1905. Our images began in the early years of the 20th century with the foundation of the PWMU emerging from the flourishing of first wave feminism which led to women's suffrage and organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). These women in their long dresses, their hair pinned into buns or hidden beneath elegant hats gaze at the camera with an earnestness and strength of purpose.

The focus of these women was the work of foreign missions and they raised vast sums to support the work of Presbyterian missionaries in faraway lands – in India, China and the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and among Māori missions in New Zealand.

In the 1920s and 1930s the hem lines rise but the hats remain. The women pose in formal portraits outside churches and halls, often with small children in tow. This new younger generation of women wanted to pursue a wider sphere of interest, with emphasis on social issues at home as well as foreign missions abroad. Many of them formed themselves into a new organization, the Women's Fellowship.

Meanwhile, change was taking place in the role of women within the Church. In 1955 women gained the right to become elders and so to become involved in the governance of the Church, at both a local and national level. Then in 1965 Rev. Margaret Reid Martin became the first woman to be ordained as a minister of word and sacrament in the New Zealand Presbyterian Church. Around the same time the PWMU and Women's Fellowship merged to form a new organization, the Association of Presbyterian Women (APW).

With the 1970s came second wave feminism and along with their traditional focus came a new interest in equity and gender justice. There was also increasing diversity, with a rising Pasifika membership.

The 2000s brought an international role when the APW gained special consultative status at the United Nations. However, by this time the organisation was declining as its membership aged and younger women played different roles within church and society. In 2014 the organization remodeled itself in an attempt to attract these younger women, and became PWANZ, but earlier this year the difficult decision was made to wind up.

The final words of farewell were given by a woman, occupying the highest role within the Presbyterian Church, something those first members staring earnestly into the camera could barely have imagined.