

Methodist Conference 2011

Te Háhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

CONFERENCE SUMMARY



The Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand met in the Logan Campbell Centre, ASB Showgrounds from Saturday November 5 until Wednesday November 9.

The first part of the Conference on Saturday and Sunday was a time of inspiration, including welcome, celebration, induction, farewell, ordination.

Powhiri

The powhiri included the acknowledgement of those lay and ordained people who had died during the year, who had given significant leadership to the Connexion.

The induction of the President John Roberts and Vice-President Olive Amani Tanielu, was a feast of music and colour with five different choirs, a brass band, organ, keyboard and drums all adding to the sense of occasion and fittingly introducing the theme, “Our Place- God’s Place.

President John spoke of the significance of place, quoting Peter Townsend a New Zealand toponymist (one who studies the significance of place names and the stories they tell) who says: “where you grow up, where you live- it becomes part of your DNA. Its part of becoming indigenous. ...Where you live starts to be about who you are and what you are about.”

President John also quoted John Inge who in his book *A Christian Theology of Place* says that Christian theology should take place seriously, that a renewed understanding of the importance of place from a theological perspective has much to offer in working against the dehumanising effects of the loss of place. Some of us may take for granted the places where we have lived and now live. Some of us may have moved about a lot and not found a sense of belonging in any place. Others may have been displaced from their homes and forced to relocate elsewhere. John then went on to develop the idea that what we all need is a place to stand.

Vice-President Olive(pronounced “awe-Lee-vay”) went on to develop a basic question that all Samoan children are taught in Sunday School, “Where is God? God is in everything. She spoke of her faith development from her birth into a parsonage home in Samoa, her schooling in the Methodist Avoka Girls Boarding School from Form 2 to becoming Vice-President of the Methodist Church of NZ.

Olive paid particular tribute to her journey in the Methodist Women's Fellowship where she had been nurtured and developed skills in leadership.

Olive concluded with a moving story of how we cannot judge people by appearances and how a small baby brought love to a ragged old man, shunned by the adults around him.

Vice-President Olive concluded, "God is in everything no matter what label we put on people and places. No matter how polluted and over-crowded our places are, God looks into our inner beings. God's love is shown through simple things at any time or place. Our place, God's place, let God be the host of our place so we can be at his place.

Acknowledging Those Who Have Died

Outgoing President and Vice-President, Desmond Cooper and Sue Spindler, then hosted a liturgy and lunch for the family members of the deceased.

Keynote Address

Guest speaker, John Bluck, the recently retired Anglican Bishop of Waiapu gave the keynote address on Saturday afternoon. The address was entitled "Claiming our place". Bishop John spoke about the power of place, the importance of having a place to stand, a turangawaewae, a place to claim as our own, to belong in, even if we don't own it legally.

Book Launch

The keynote address was followed by the launching of Diana Robert's book "Kitchen Theology" which was a compilation of the articles Diana wrote for Touchstone under the same title. True to title the occasion was very different from the usual book launch. Diana had set up a table as a kitchen and then proceeded to make bread, theologising as she went. This was a great occasion and a fine tribute to Diana's ministry in writing.

Cultural Evening

Vahefonua Tonga, Sinoti Samoa, and Wasewase then treated the Conference to a magnificent feast and a wonderful evening of Pacific cultural entertainment including a fashion parade showing all the different styles of tauvala and kiekie(mats worn over clothing by Tongans for special occasions), including wonderful wedding outfits.

Ordination

The ordination service on Sunday morning was attended by more than 2,000 people from all over New Zealand. All the Auckland Churches closed so that their congregations could join in worship with the Conference. Five probationers were ordained and received into Full Connexion; Kalo Kaisa, Goll Fan Manukia, Misilei Misilei, Dale Peach, Simote Taunga. The ordination charge was preached by the Ex President Desmond Cooper. Ex-President Desmond challenged the ordinands to be passionate about their ministry reminding them that John Wesley knew the true value of life. He knew life was God-given and given for a purpose. Ex-President Desmond noted that all our lives have a God-given purpose and that all we need is the courage to live it out – the courage to take up Wesley's "Holy Passion".

Conference also received into Full Connexion, Ian Croft and Tom Waight from the Presbyterian Church, Ian Hanley transferring from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa and Polynesia and Trevor Hoggard from the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

On Sunday afternoon Conference members and visitors were treated to two and a half hours of an amazing variety of musical and other items by children and youth from around the country. This was a highlight of the Conference and all who attended were left with a sense the church is in good hands".

The Business Committees meet briefly to discuss their various reports before presenting to the Conference before Conference members were able to have a much needed early night!

Official Representatives from the Anglican and Catholic Churches, Methodist Church of Samoa, Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and Uniting Church of Australia were welcomed on Monday morning and brought greetings to the Conference.

The Conference staff were introduced and the General Secretary then presented Conference questions 1-24 for acceptance by Conference. These questions relate to the deployment of Presbyters, Deacons, Probationers, Candidates and Lay Ministers for the next Connexional year.

Council of Conference

The Council reported on its work for the year. The Council reminded Synods that it is important to send nominations of lay and ordained for both the office of President and Vice-President so that the situation that occurred this year did not get repeated. This year a lay person was nominated for Presidency but there was no corresponding ordained name for the Vice Presidency so the person was not able to be considered.

The Council will continue to foster the bicultural journey of Te Haahi Weteriana and to develop a vision to take Te Haahi forward.

Te Taha Maori

Te Taha Maori presented an interesting account of its work. Trips by members to the World Methodist Conference and Israel (accompanying a Trinity College party) as well as a large Rangitahi camp were all highlights of the year.

Keita Hotere spoke of her experiences at the Youth gathering of the World Methodist Council and encouraged all Pacific groups to consider sending representatives to future conferences.

Lana Lazarus, Keita Hotere, Piripi Rakena, Gillian Laird, Bella Ngaha, Joanne Flay and Tamati Rakena, were received to begin training as Minita-a-iwi.

Tauiwi

The Superintendent of Wasewase spoke a word of thanks to people in the Church who have assisted Wasewase develop its life in New Zealand.

Alan Webster Superintendent spoke to the report noting that a very successful camp was held at Living Springs, Christchurch.

The purpose of Tauiwi Strategy is to give expression to the partnership between Cultural groups and other expressions of diversity.

A focus at present is to find ways to work better with our ecumenical partners in CV's.

Mission Resourcing

The Mission Resourcing report was received in three different sessions. On Monday Refresh Director, Andrew Gammon gave a very helpful presentation on the 10 Minutes on Tuesday Resource and invited individuals and Parishes to perhaps consider preparing one edition.

Parishes were encouraged to participate in the Church Life Survey – funded by Mission Resourcing.

Introduced a change that all candidates for ministry be enrolled in a Trinity College programme of study.

In the second session, it was emphasised how important Police vetting was for all people who worked with children and youth.

Esme Cole gave a presentation on the work being done in children's ministry. She spoke of the importance of sharing resources and asked Parishes to let Mission Resourcing know what sort of resources would be helpful.

On Tuesday afternoon there was a robust discussion regarding Youth Ministry. This was initially engaging and helpful but unfortunately became confused. A group was asked to go away and attempt to work at a suggested way forward and bring this back to Conference on the final morning.

Conference adopted the resolution brought by the group:

1. Conference agrees to the following for the consultation on Taiui Youth:

Purpose:

To prepare a plan for the future of and a vision for Taiui Youth Ministry – local, regional and national.

Principles:

- The church is passionate about the future of youth in the life of the church.
- Taiui youth has a place in the ministry and leadership of the church now.
- Taiui is committed to a ministry to, with and by youth and is concerned for the nurture of youth spirituality, Christian growth, education and justice for all young people.
- There must be a vision for Taiui Youth Ministry.
- There must be a forward looking plan developed and implemented for the future of Youth Ministry.

i. Conference appoints a consultative group to prepare the vision of and plan for Taiui Youth Ministry to report in the first instance to the Board of Mission Resourcing who will bring a final report and proposal to Conference 2012.

ii. Membership:

Co-conveners – Sue Spindler and one of the youth representatives, Abhishek Solomon, Viv Whimster, Jessica Rabone, Siu Williams-Lemi, Filo Tu, Edna Te'o, Osaiasi Kupu, Goll Fan Manukia, a Mission Resourcing Director, (one other yet to be confirmed by President John).

Methodist Mission Aotearoa/Social Services

Mary Caygill encouraged us to follow Wesley's concept of the Whole Gospel. Our Christian Social Services embody the enactment of compassion.

Each of the social service providers from Auckland to Dunedin, Vahefonua Tonga and Sinoti Samoa shared a highlight of their year. Conference was asked two questions which were discussed in table groups:

- 1 What is going on in your community?
- 2 How can we the Church help?

Mission and Ecumenical

A key paper in front of the Conference was the proposal for a Churches Forum for Christian Unity. This was the result of the work of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity. The part played by the Rev Brian Turner in establishing this dialogue during his Presidency, was acknowledged. Conference affirmed the proposal and agreed that the Methodist Church of NZ should become a member.

The tremendous contribution made by retiring Secretary John Roberts to the work of both Mission and Ecumenism was warmly affirmed by the Conference. Conference welcomes Rev Prince Devanandan to the Secretary's position.

The Faith and Order Committee

The Committee completed a substantial piece of work for the Investment Advisory Board in writing a preamble to the Guidelines for Socially Responsible Investment.

There were reports on Anglican Methodist and Catholic Methodist conversations, national and international.

Lay Superintendency of Synods sparked considerable discussion and this was referred to Taiwi Strategy for more work.

The Committee reported on progress on the revision of the orders for Holy Communion.

Trinity College

Principal, David Bell, reported on the significant changes made by the College over the past three years. It was exciting to hear that there are currently 304 course enrolments representing 48 full-time equivalent students.

Trinity College has recovered the vision for lay training. To foster this the Council has established **Wellspring- at- Waiake** as a dedicated place to foster lay training.

Dorothy Wills told Conference of how the new structure is serving lay leaders well in their preparation for a variety of ministries. Ruta Galo a young lay woman spoke about how she lives her Christian witness in a secular employment setting and affirmed how Trinity College courses have assisted her.

The Board of Administration

The Board gave a presentation showing the devastation to Church buildings in the Christchurch area caused by the September 4, February 22 and June earthquakes. Greg Wright explained the consequences for both insurance and strengthening of buildings. As a result Conference passed a resolution asking that the Methodist Connexional Property Committee review the ongoing use of buildings which do not meet 67% of code together with options to strengthen the buildings to not less than 67% of such code requirements and provide a timeframe for this to be completed.

The PAC Endowment Review was accepted in its entirety by Conference. This included a proposal to have the flexibility to make an endowment for property development where Conference deems a proposal to be a Connexional Mission priority.

Conference agreed that every Methodist Parish or parish under Methodist oversight continues to be required to contribute to the provision of Superannuation for Methodist Presbyters and Deacons.

Parish accountancy standards are going to have to comply with new financial reporting standards required by the charities Commission. The Board is seeking to develop an online accounting package to assist Parishes comply.

Ex President/Ex Vice President

Desmond Cooper and Sue Spindler shared a powerpoint presentation showing the many and varied experiences they had been part of during their year of office. They had visited Churches through the whole country, attending celebrations and making pastoral visits. Desmond attended the World Methodist Conference in Durbin, South Africa and Sue attended the Conference in Tonga. They acknowledged how much they had appreciated working together to serve the Church. Conference acknowledged them with acclamation.

Communications

Conference congratulated Touchstone on the two Awards won from the Australasian Religious Press Association. Paul Titus gained a Silver Award for feature by a Single Author and Brendan Boughan a Bronze Award for humour.

The paper has increased its content and distribution and the Church is encouraged to reflect carefully on the way they can support and help touchstone.

Public Questions

can be downloaded from the Methodist Surveyed the Church and found that there were three main areas of focus:

Welfare Reform, Development and Overseas aid and Environmental Responsibility.

2 The committee introduced the Stewards of Creation resource and indicated an accompanying DVD will be available next year – This website.

Interchurch Bioethics Council

The group reported about their work as an interdisciplinary category of ethics that provides the framework for policy and decision- making with regard to scientific research and resulting technologies, including future consequences, legal political, commercial, theological and social aspects.

Church members may follow the work of this group on their website (www.interchurchbioethics.org.nz). Bella Ngaha indicated that it was good to now have two maori members on the committee.

Law Revision

Conference adopted the Standards for Membership and Ministry and professional Practice and a working paper on Membership of the Methodist Church of New Zealand.

A resolution clarifying how to lodge Notices of Motion and memorials was adopted. Conference affirmed the decisions made by the President during the year.

Morning Devotions

The daily Conference devotions were led by members of Te Taha Maori.

Day 1: To Matou Turanga – Our Place, Gods Place

Day 2: Manaakitia To Matou Kainga – Our Place

Day 3: Manaaki Tangata – Caring for our relationships

President and Vice-President Elect

The 2011 Conference saw the election of the first President and Vice-President who will serve a two year term rather than the traditional model of one year. The Conference five plus five panel brought the names of Rex Nathan for President and Jan Tasker for Vice-President. Conference warmly affirmed this recommendation by standing ovation.

Speakers

Joan Tofaeono and David Poultney gave a joint presentation entitled “Hope in this Time and Place”. An exploration of how - even amidst overwhelming difficulty – the Christian faith offers another story, a narrative of hope.

After the Christchurch Earthquakes

Members of the Central South Island Synod led by Jill Hawkey gave a moving presentation of what it is like for them and their congregations post earthquake.