



# **PRESIDENTIAL TEAM ADDRESS**

**'God of the past, present  
and future - God in a  
changing world'**

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Vice-President: Jan Tasker**

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*Wesley College*

Te Hāhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

## **‘God of the past, present and future – God in a changing world’**

Vice President Jan and I look back over the past 11 months and say “Wow, where did the time go?”

Seems like it was only last month that we were in Poneke, enjoying having dinner in the company of the Governor General, Sir Jerry Mateparae. Engaging in waiata with members of the Patea Maori Culture Club, listening to jokes from the mercurial and masterly joke teller Uncle Napi Waaka.

We have travelled from Seoul, South Korea in the North to Dunedin in the South and in between, to several parts of the Pacific, Australia, and Aotearoa.

We have worshipped and joined in fellowship with lots of different cultural groups and enjoyed every minute of it.

As we have travelled and met with various groups of people, our Methodist Church Aotearoa theme “God of the past, present and future” has been evident throughout our journey.

### **God of the past**

We have listened to people talk about the history and beginnings of their Church community.

It is relatively easy to see God at work when we look backwards. Some of that has to do with the fact that we most often learn of God from Christ in Scripture, through stories and lessons that took place in the past. And these events were put into written form with the benefit of hindsight, when the authors’ ability to see God’s presence became clearer. I think most of us are much better at looking *back* than looking *forwards*.

### **God of the present**

We have heard the importance of God in their lives as they live out there being in the present moment.

But can we look around and see God at work in the here and now?

It is obvious that the world is a very different place now than it was during the early beginnings. The role of the church is very different as well. If we can be honest with each other, we face incredible challenges. Our numbers are far fewer than they were. The Church is no longer the people's first choice of where couples choose to marry. And we are not unique in these challenges. Churches have always faced challenges; and these challenges are ours in the present.

And yet, there is something vitally important about what our Church community means *now*, what it represents to those of us who have *chosen* to make these places our home for worship and service.

During our visits to different places, we have heard our people talk about their church, their community, and what it means to them. They are comforted and loved by the people that surround them, but they are also grateful to be stretched and challenged about the things of faith.

We have learned to put it this way: We are here, and we are committed to serving and ministering to our community; and yet, we also know that our society's priorities of "bigger, better, faster, and stronger" are misplaced and misguided. We know that there is more to life; and we are eager to learn together what that is.

### **God of the Future**

We are encouraged to hear people talking about their vision for the future.

But what do we really know about what is coming? Perhaps, nothing; except that it will be unlike anything we might imagine. The pace of change is breathtaking; it can be overwhelming at times. I am old enough to remember when the purpose of a telephone was to call people or for people to call you. Now, telephones with thousands of Apps attached are capable of

processing more information that one can ever imagine. So who knows what lies ahead?

Jeremiah 29, v11 – 14; Revelation 21, v1 – 6.

The lessons of Scripture are drawn from the past, but more than anything else, they suggest the way forward. The reading from Jeremiah says it this way: “I know the plans I have for you,” says God, “to give you a future filled with hope!” And **Revelation** goes on to expand that thought: “the home of God is among us...God is making all things new!”

**‘God of the past, present and future – God in a changing world’** is the theme for this year’s Conference.

As we have travelled, and especially in the Pacific Islands, we noticed that each of these islands are self-sufficient and self-supporting in terms of feeding its people. They grow their own vegetables and fruit, raise stock and animals for local consumption. Fish from the sea helps to sustain its people.

Admittedly these island nations require support from the Australian and New Zealand Governments as well family members living abroad, but they basically can live off the land and food from the sea.

When we travel around New Zealand, we see a completely different picture. We see lots of land but not much in the way of vegetable gardens and fruit trees like we have seen in the Pacific Islands.

I can recall as a child growing up that every family in the community had big gardens and fruit trees. Our role as children was to prepare the ground, plant, water the vegetables and remove the weeds.

What changed? The children left home and our parents were not able to manage the big gardens. The Four Square store came to town and it was inexpensive to buy the groceries.

In terms of growing vegetables and fruit, two generations of people in New Zealand have not experienced what is normal in the Pacific Islands.

What can we do about it. Here is a challenge Vice President Jan and I propose.

We know that young people embrace the world of modern technology and what appears really simple for them is very difficult for elderly folk to understand let alone use it.

I know many elderly folk are keen to learn how to use the internet because it means they can see and communicate with their children and grandchildren many miles away.

The challenge is this. Allow the children and grandchildren to teach the use of modern technology and in exchange the elderly folk teach the children and grandchildren how to grow fruit and vegetables. Even if it is only a little patch at the back of the house.

We know that life changes and the things of the past are superseded by more modern technology. But growing vegetables has never changed; it is still the same now as it was many years ago. What has changed is our ability to teach and encourage the younger generation to do the things we used to do.

We are convinced that what lies ahead is a future filled with hope. As much as God was with us during our beginnings, and as much as God is with us in 2013, God will be with us in the years to come! There will *always* be a place for a church that knows that there is more to life than meets the eye.

God has been here; is here now; and will always be here. Our role remains to trust in that truth, to act in the confidence and hope that it brings. Thanks be to God!

President Rev Rex Nathan      Vice-President Miss Jan Tasker