

TAUIWI STRATEGY & STATIONING

The Tauwi Strategy Committee meets twice annually – in March and in August. We had a relatively large turnover in personnel this year, saying farewell to several synod superintendents and welcoming their replacements, as well as a change of Director of Pasifika ministries, a new Principal and a new Presidential team. By the end of our second meeting, we had all greatly relaxed and if we can maintain the degree of trust, openness and mutual support we experienced in our August meeting, it is hoped that this committee may go on to produce a significant contribution to the life of the Church over the next few years.

In a bid to cut costs and try something new, we dispensed with especially appointed facilitators, and relied on the Directors to facilitate the business. We will evaluate this change after a few meetings.

Tauwi Sexuality Work Group

Conference will be receiving a report from this group established by Conference last year and funded by a PAC grant. Strategy Committee received updates at its March and August meetings and commends the report of the Tauwi Sexuality Work Group to Conference for consideration. Strategy Committee asks Faith & Order to consider whether a paper on leadership in the Church might be helpful in guiding those entrusted with steering the Church through difficult and contentious conversations about ethics and theology.

Standard Working Week

Strategy Committee engaged briefly in conversation at both its March and August meetings about how to regulate the work expected in part time appointments. We are aware that some who are supposedly part time are expected to give far more time to the Church than could be strictly demanded from someone on a half time or quarter time basis, but as soon as we started to consider fixed hours of ministry, we realised that we risked tampering with fundamental understandings of ministry, of vocation, and of availability. We reached no conclusions, but remain aware that what we expect of those in part time appointments must be fair to them, their families and their other employers. We also reminded ourselves that those in part time appointments are also part of a Connexional Church and will have responsibilities to synod and possibly Connexional committees which should form part of their “work” time, but recognised it would be unjust for a synod or Connexional Board to habitually eat up most of someone’s part time ministry, leaving little time to fulfil their prime tasks in the parish which appointed them. One proposal was that those on 10 hours per week or less, should be paid at an hourly rate and those hours should remain at the disposal of the parish which is funding the appointment, and any further hours given to synod or Connexional activities should be deemed “additional and voluntary” and outside of those hours the parish is paying for. This would at least prevent those parishes which can only pay for a minimal amount of ministerial cover from having a large proportion of that time eaten into by other Church bodies. This conversation is set to continue.

Trans-Cultural Report

Tauwi Strategy Committee received a short report of this work at its August meeting. Conference will be presented with a report on this matter by those three Connexional officers appointed by Conference 2013. Strategy Committee was alerted to the potentially controversial nature of the discussion likely to take place at Conference and agreed that the paper being submitted to Conference should receive sufficient time at the Tauwi meeting for the issues to be thoroughly aired.

Growth and Renewal

In keeping with the Presidential focus: *A time to sow, a time to grow*, Strategy Committee spent considerable time at both its March and August gatherings to consider matters of growth and renewal. Early in the year, two papers were circulated by the General Secretary asking if Te Haahi Weteriana should seek to rediscover its Methodist DNA, whether we should promote more widely to the community our broad cultural and theological diversity whilst affirming our Connexional interdependence. The Committee reflected on the responses received to these papers. The superintendent of the Evangelical Network also contributed to this discussion at both meetings, seeking to “put something into the hands of every member” that speaks of our identity and our

mission as a Church. In this paper, the committee was invited to affirm three distinctive characteristics of the Methodist Church of New Zealand/ Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa: bi-culturalism; inclusiveness; consensus decision-making. We are not at the point yet when there is a finished document or resource to be “put in every member’s hand” – but the work will continue.

The Director English-speaking ministries added to this debate at our August meeting by reminding the committee of a law passed by Conference a few years ago which states that money lodged in CB&L by parishes which is left unused for new property initiatives for five years should then be assigned to the synod for the furtherance of synod strategy (Property Information Leaflet 40). This law has not been enacted, but we considered what the likely impact would be if those parishes which currently survive on interest from CB&L deposits were to lose them, whilst the synod would have the benefit of money to give to support new initiatives elsewhere in the synod. At present, there is no correlation between parishes that have money from past sale of buildings in CB&L and those parishes which have plans for growth and renewal. It will take further discussions for us to think through how this law would be enacted and what the effects would be on both parishes and synods. However, at this stage Tauwi Strategy wishes to bring before Conference a Suggested Decision that the wording of the Property Information Leaflet 40 be changed. Currently, the wording states that unused funds held in CB&L by parishes should be assigned to the synod after five years to be used in the “regional *property* strategy”. Strategy Committee wishes to remove the reference to *property*, thereby allowing such funds to be used in a broader range of synod initiatives.

The conversation on growth and renewal also highlighted a gap in our present resources: we do not have enough presbyters or lay people who have undertaken training in Church planting and in transitional ministries. Please register your interest with Mission Resourcing if you feel called to either ministry.

Ordained Leadership in Provincial and Rural Settings

The August meeting of Tauwi Strategy considered the options for providing ordained ministry for lesser-populated areas of the country, especially where parishes can no longer offer full time appointments. It was felt that the traditional Methodist circuit model of ministry may well be one possible solution, alongside other options, such as LSM teams. It was recognised that both parishes and presbyters would need adequate preparation for a circuit model of ministry and mission because such a lot of that knowledge has been lost to the Church over recent decades when we have worked on a parish model. Some considered that CV parishes prevented the establishment of such an essentially Methodist model, whilst others thought that CV parishes would be equally open to engaging in such a way. This will remain on the agenda for further discussion when possible circuit models are being considered by synods.

The Strategy committee also reaffirmed its commitment to the “small church”; there is no automatic point at which we close down a parish for lack of numbers in Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa. Where two or three gather we will endeavour to find ways of supporting them as a connexion. Buildings are not always required; ordained ministry can be from a regional source or even using modern technology (streaming services on the internet and other web-based resources). What matters from the Methodist point of view is not the size of the group, but whether the group still feels it has a mission to perform.

Anglican-Methodist Covenant

Whilst the inter-church dialogues are normally reported under Faith & Order business, it was felt appropriate to remind synod leaders of the progress to date of the Anglican-Methodist covenant and the proposals going before General Synod next year which could well lead to the mutual interchange of Anglican and Methodist clergy. The committee heard details of the Irish model in which the President is recognised as exercising an “episcopal ministry” thus enabling Anglican bishops to participate in the induction of Methodist Presidents and Methodist Presidents to be involved in the consecration of Anglican bishops.

We noted two changes this would involve; one for the Methodists and one for the Anglicans. For the Methodists, this would probably mean that the induction of a President had to include the laying on of hands. For the Anglicans, we noted that in the Methodist Church of New Zealand lay

people can also serve as President. We thought that our distinctively Methodist contribution to this debate would be to remain loyal to our understanding of lay/ordained partnership in ministry and emphasise that for us the “Presidential team” exercises episcopal ministry.

Initiative on Countering Family Violence

At our August meeting we were reminded of the work Sinoti Samoa is doing in the area of countering family violence. Training work-shops are offered by Sinoti and further information about this valuable work may be obtained by contacting the synod leadership.

Matters Passing Through From Council of Conference

At each meeting of Taiuiwi Strategy we receive a report of what is on the agenda at the Council of Conference. The Strategy meeting includes all Taiuiwi members of Council of Conference who are either already part of the Strategy committee, or are invited as observers because they represent Taiuiwi on the Council of Conference. This means that the Strategy committee has chance to comment on various matters that will appear before Conference in the report of the Council of Conference or some other connexional Board. In this manner, Taiuiwi Strategy Committee has at various times this year discussed the paper on *Personal Gifts and Donations*; marriage and candidates for ministry; Public Issues Network funding; a 2-Yearly Conference (which generally we support); lay/clergy balance in Conference (which we don't consider such a burning issue since we have consensus decision-making); size and cost of Conference (we support proposals for looking for cheaper venues); proposal to end the policy of PAC Endowment grants (to which we gave cautious assent).

Report to Taiuiwi and Conference from the Taiuiwi Task Group on Sexuality

The Task

The task group was established by Conference 2014 with the remit to “prepare a comprehensive theological statement of current issues relating to human sexuality and leadership within Taiuiwi...in order to progress a response from Taiuiwi to the question put to Taiuiwi by Te Taha Maori.” The focus of the question to Taiuiwi is whether or not a gay or lesbian person could be President.

The members of the task group were appointed by Conference to reflect “the diversity of culture, theological perspective and sexual orientation found within Taiuiwi”.

The Process

It was agreed that everything said within the task group would remain confidential to members of the meeting and that any communication with the church would be agreed by the group beforehand. Interim short reports have been made after each meeting and sent to synod superintendents.

In the first session, members shared their own stories of events, or things they had read, which impacted significantly on their understanding of human sexuality.

It was agreed that the purpose of this particular conversation is not to attempt to force everyone into one point of view, but to help each of us within the church to understand, respect and love the other whatever their view on this subject. The task group agreed that the conversation had to be open and honest and respectful of all points of view and great pains were taken to avoid rancour or distress. Methodists are by nature passionate people; we *feel* our theology strongly and we acknowledge the challenge we face when discussing something so important when we hold different views so firmly, but we believe in our Christian duty as Church to model to other Christian communities and to the world how people with different views, passionately held, can nonetheless maintain friendly and respectful relations whilst engaging in such a difficult conversation.

The second session traced the history of the debate on matters of human sexuality over recent decades in the church starting from the 1980's onwards. The meeting acknowledged the pain and some of the unfortunate behaviour displayed on all sides and the acrimonious divisions caused especially around the matter of sexual orientation. The meeting agreed that this task group forms

the next step in an already existing journey; we are not starting the conversation from the beginning, but taking it up again to see where it may now lead.

The task group wishes to commend to the church the noble aspiration the MCNZ/Te Haahi Weteriana has set itself, to hold together in respect and harmonious relations people who hold very different views in matters of ethics and theology.

The most obvious and striking revelation to members of the task group at its very first meeting was how much further we have to travel together before we are in any position to give a definitive answer to the question from Te Taha Maori. We learnt that public discussion of sexual matters, especially in a mixed company of men and women, diverse in so many ways such as we constitute in our synod and Conference meetings, is extremely difficult for some cultures owing to their cultural *tapu* system which impacts upon such discussions and the way in which they take place. One of the initial challenges the church must face is how we enable then such respectful, honest and meaningful conversation to take place recognising the realities, the richness and inherent gift of such diversity.

The Catholic Spirit

From 3rd May to the 30th June 1749 in the city of Cork, Ireland, Catholic mobs attacked Methodists and their homes and businesses with clubs, stones and swords, causing considerable injury to both persons and property. In the light of this Wesley wrote his famously eirenic *Letter to a Roman Catholic* in which he says to any opponents:

If then we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least may we love alike.

Wesley spoke of this same theme in two sermons in particular. In Sermon 38: *Against Bigotry*, he defines bigotry as “too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, Church and religion.” In his better known Sermon 39: *The Catholic Spirit*, written in 1755 in the aftermath of the troubles in Ireland, Wesley repeats the mantra, “though we cannot think alike, may we love alike” and continues:

To be ignorant of many things, and to mistake in some, is the necessary condition of humanity. [Every thinking man] knows in general, that he himself is mistaken; although in what particulars he mistakes, he does not, perhaps cannot know.

Accepting human fallibility, Wesley states:

God has given no right to any of the children of men thus to lord it over the conscience of his brethren; but every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God.

Wesley was unusually open, by the standards of his day, to extending the hand of fellowship to those who belonged to other Church traditions which, in his view, did not preach the Word of God faithfully, nor duly celebrate the sacraments, because he believed the ethic of Christian love overruled all other considerations. So Wesley continued in his Sermon on the *Catholic Spirit* that if you love God, if you believe in Jesus Christ, if you are trying to do God’s will, if you love your neighbour, then:

If thou art thus minded...then ‘thy heart is right, as my heart is with thy heart. If it be, give me thy hand.’ I do not mean, ‘Be of my opinion.’ You need not...Neither do I mean, ‘I will be of your opinion.’ I cannot...Let all opinions alone on one side, and the other: Only ‘give me thine hand.’

This is not an invitation to be either vacuous, or vacillating. It is about living in harmony with those who have equally strong moral and religious convictions to your own, but to make love the greater part.

Conference recently responded to a time of ecumenical disintegration by stating boldly that: To be Methodist is to be ecumenical. Conference could equally well respond to moments of divided opinion and tension: To be Methodist is to foster the Catholic Spirit.

True dialogue takes time. We won't make progress by trying to resolve issues too quickly or by trying to convert people forcibly and without grace to our own point of view. Setting the right tone and ensuring a safe environment for such meaningful and respectful conversations is essential.

In reading through a variety of the key reports from other international church bodies and denominations with whom we often draw from for a breadth of perspective on both ethical and liturgical matters, we may be struck by the familiarity of very similar journeys and processes in dealing with church conflicts over sexuality. In the various denominations, debates on sexual ethics and treatment of minorities have sparked heated international controversy. This is sometimes seen as a conflict between a 'liberal' west and 'conservative' south; but the reality is more complicated. Both acceptance of, and hostility towards, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people can be found across continents and cultures in the respective churches.

Each church has needed to embark on a journey of conversation, often heated and needing on the way the corrective challenge of becoming more respectful in conversation and gracing each other with the dignity of all being embraced in the all-inclusive love and dignity of God. The journey of Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa reflects many of the journeys commented on in the varying global denominational reports, particularly those of the United Church of Canada and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. Along the way these two denominations have taken time to reflect over careful theological work and conversation has achieved a fuller acceptance of those of a sexual orientation different from conventional norms. These two bodies in particular have thus added supplementary material to those statements agreed on by their respective Church Conferences and Councils. This is a most helpful way forward for us within our own context at this time. In 2014 The United Church of Canada published a comprehensive study document for their church members entitled, *Moving Toward Full Inclusion: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in The United Church of Canada*.^{2nd} edition. This document, as suggested, builds on and updates the earlier formative study document which, after much heated, painful, but fruitful discussion and consultation, led to the major decisions made over the past 3 decades.

We may be moved by the very careful attention paid by the respective church leaders to 'clothe' the particular debates at each stage along the way in prayer and deep pastoral concern. Members of the workgroup believe that this can be the only way forward for us also within Te Haahi Wateriana o Aotearoa. And so in the light of where we are currently on the journey forward and recognising honestly the full and complex nature of how far we still have to go as the Tauwiwi partner before people feel free enough and sufficiently informed to engage further with this subject, it is clear to the task group that there is only one answer we can recommend to the Conference in response to the question posed to Tauwiwi by Te Taha Maori:

At the current time there is no consensus within Tauwiwi about this matter, nor the prospect of any such consensus in the near future, and so the task group recommends to Conference, through Tauwiwi Strategy, that the Tauwiwi response to the Te Taha Maori question be: "That at this time there is no consensus for a gay or lesbian person to be acceptable as President".

However, it is equally evident to the task group that this conversation should continue. Over recent years, Conference has agreed to the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and allowed for people to live in same sex partnerships and made arrangements for the celebration of same sex marriage and civil unions to be held on church premises when all relevant parties agree. Change in procedures has been seen over the years, despite the church's lack of unanimity on the subject, so that suggests that further discussion on the question raised by Te Taha Maori may also lead to a way forward with which differing points of view can live together.

Areas for Further Study

As a result of our work, the task group has identified several areas which are essential to allow the conversation to proceed:

- History is important. Anyone wishing to engage in this conversation needs to understand the nature of the conversation so far, otherwise we risk always starting from the beginning again. People are being invited to join a conversation that is already several decades old and resources have been compiled to furnish participants with this history. (The Appendix at the end of this report written by the Reverend Dr Susan Thompson contains a

comprehensive historical summary of the conversation to date). Language is important. Many members of the task group did not understand that in Pacific languages there are often no words or terminology for the conversation. Those words that do exist often have an inbuilt moral tone, usually condemnatory. The task group has initiated among its Pasifika members the compilation of a suitable vocabulary, where one doesn't exist, to help facilitate this conversation because language carries knowledge.

- Biblical interpretation is important - indeed we believe it is central to the whole conversation. Methodists seek religious truth through the matrix of the Methodist Quadrilateral of the Bible, Tradition, Reason and Experience. For some Methodists the Bible is the beginning and the end of the truth;
- But for Methodists who start elsewhere on the Quadrilateral there may be other concepts of what constitutes a Christian response. The task group has identified some very helpful material on the use of the Bible in relation to sexual ethics from the British Methodist Church (www.methodistchurch.org.uk – Public Issues – 1990 Report on Human Sexuality) and the United Church of Canada (the 2014 Report on Same Sex Marriage www.united-church.ca – Social Justice – 2011 Consultation with GLBTT; 2014 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Moving Towards Full Inclusion). Further work on Biblical interpretation will be done and the task group hopes that it will be ready for inclusion into its report to Conference.

The task group was established to report back to Conference 2015 and it has been funded by a grant from PAC distribution. We do not believe the task is complete, but it is time for the group to find a new way of continuing the conversation, and crucially, to find a way of facilitating the conversation across the whole of Tauwi.

The task group believes it has established a way of talking together that should be the model for others. The church has a duty of care to its gay and lesbian members and its young people who are going through the unsettling period of puberty and discovering their own sexuality, and so we must make sure that the church is a safe place for people to discuss such intimate matters in a caring and respectful environment.

We are also aware that our conversation is taking place against the backdrop of the secular society in which we live and in the ecumenical world of our fellow Christians. New Zealand society has already taken a stance in law about gay and lesbian relationships, Human Rights Convention and the UN protocol on discrimination known as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (est. 1982; UN) - CEDAW. Even if the church wished to halt this conversation because we find it too difficult, it would be impossible to do so. The task group therefore recommends that the conversation does continue.

The Members

Mary Caygill, Andrew Donaldson, Trevor Hoggard, Barbara Peddie, David Poultney, Susan Thompson, Mataiva Robertson, Nasili Vakauta, Alan Webster, Facilitator: Jill van de Geer
Michael Lemanu, Eseta Penaia (Youth representatives)
Appointed by Wasewase ko Viti: Unaisi Tikoinaka
Appointed by Sinoti Samoa: Paulo Ieli, Opeta Amani
Appointed by Vahefonua Tonga: Ikilifi Pope, Melenaita Taumoefolau,

Suggested decisions:

1. At the current time there is no consensus within Tauwi about this matter, nor the prospect of any such consensus in the near future, and so the task group recommends to Conference, through Tauwi Strategy, that the Tauwi response to the Te Taha Maori question be: "That at this time there is no consensus for a gay or lesbian person to be acceptable as President".
2. That ten members of this group form the core of a continuing task group which shall be facilitated by Mission Resourcing. The task group shall meet face to face at least twice per year to maintain and foster existing relationships and to discuss further papers relating to human sexuality. Members of the task group will be available to facilitate similar conversations around Tauwi, when they are invited to do so, at synods or schools of theology, or at Trinity College.

APPENDIX

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION

The Methodist Church's conversation on the place of gay and lesbian people in the life of the church and community is one that has been taking place now for more than fifty years. This paper sets out the history of that conversation and of critical decisions made by the Methodist Conference between 1961 and 2005. It is very much an initial narrative. More work remains to be done exploring the way Methodist conversations related to the social, political and religious context in which they took place. This context includes changing views about sexuality and marriage, the development of gay and lesbian identity in New Zealand and the changing nature of New Zealand Methodism itself.

Decriminalisation

The conversation began in the early 1960s and was initially focussed on the decriminalisation of homosexuality. In mid-twentieth century New Zealand homosexuals were seen as sick or sinful and faced social disapproval, hostility and outright rejection. Male homosexual activity was liable for prosecution and a term of imprisonment.

Methodist support for decriminalisation dates from 1961 when Conference adopted a report from the Public Questions Committee advocating the legal toleration of homosexual practices. The report did not condone homosexual behaviour (describing it as an "abnormality" and a "private immorality") yet argued that legal toleration would remove "injustices and anomalies" and open the way "to a more constructive treatment of a hidden problem".ⁱ

In 1985 the Joint Methodist-Presbyterian Public Questions Committee reaffirmed support for decriminalisation as it urged acceptance of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill. Noting new understandings of sexuality and sexual orientation, the Committee declared that it was a "fundamental value of the Christian Gospel to accept people as they are and not to punish them for characteristics which they have not chosen." The Committee acknowledged "strong and sincere opposition to homosexual law reform within our churches", but stated that even if the majority of New Zealanders perceived homosexual acts to be immoral "we do not believe that the criminal law should be used to enforce that view."ⁱⁱ

Ordination and Full Connexion

With the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Act in 1986 the focus of Methodist conversations about the place of gay and lesbian people shifted to a consideration of issues of discrimination and acceptance.

A significant contribution to "thinking and discussion" of the biblical and theological issues relating to homosexuality was made by the Faith and Order Committee in 1985. Its working paper "The Church and Homosexuality" sought to go beyond the "restricted scope" and "judgemental language" of 1961. Quoting recent scholarship, the Committee argued that relationships of "trust and commitment, of love and fidelity, as many homosexuals have entered into" were "radically different from those that scripture pronounces upon". It saw a need to develop a Christian response to homosexuality in the light of "our theological understanding of God's will for human fulfilment". Noting that "Jesus Christ calls us to be our true selves", the Committee argued that insisting on the validity of heterosexual expression only was "denying the personhood of a very significant minority". The paper also raised concern about "homophobia", the fear of homosexuals, and called upon the church to listen "with a humble spirit" to the experience of homosexuals and to appreciate the results of intolerance and bigotry on their lives.ⁱⁱⁱ

The more sympathetic approach to homosexuality advocated by Faith and Order was met with some disquiet by Methodists who held a more conservative viewpoint.^{iv} Their concerns became increasingly evident as the conversation about the place of gay and lesbian people within the church intensified in the early 1990s.

In 1990 the Methodist Church received an application from a former Baptist minister, David Bromell, to be received into Full Connexion. A gifted scholar and pastor and an openly gay man, Bromell provided supply ministry in Dunedin from 1989 and his request to become a Methodist

minister was initially accepted by the General Purposes Committee. However the strong opinions expressed at that year's Conference made its members aware of the need for further "consideration and study" of the issue of sexuality and ministry. It was agreed that a decision on Bromell's application be delayed until the following year while such wide discussion took place.^v

It would take Methodists another fourteen years to come to a place of uneasy agreement as to whether gay and lesbian people could be ordained and received into Full Connexion. During that time debates were bitter and often painful, dividing friends and families, parishes, Synods and even the Methodist Connexion as a whole.

At the grass roots level Methodist opposition to the acceptance of gay and lesbian clergy was widespread and significant in the early 1990s. A report to the 1991 Conference, for example, noted a substantial rejection at the parish level of the notion that homosexual people might be ordained and received into Full Connexion.^{vi} It's likely that this sentiment reflected, in part, continuing social disapproval of homosexuality. Legislative changes didn't necessarily lead to a general change in attitudes.

Strong opposition to the ordination of gay and lesbian people was voiced by Methodists who identified themselves as having a conservative or evangelical theology and for whom the authority of scripture was paramount. In 1986 the Aldersgate Fellowship noted that the biblical ideal for sexual relationships "is very clearly presented as heterosexual".^{vii} Such views were shared by Methodism's growing number of Samoan, Tongan and Fijian members who made it clear that they found homosexuality unacceptable from a cultural point of view.^{viii}

Yet, some signs of change were evident within the wider church community. In June 1991 the first National Gay Christian Conference was held in Auckland with David Bromell as the keynote speaker. This ecumenical event drew together over 120 people and was an important time of affirmation for gay and lesbian Christians. The presence of heterosexual supporters pointed to a growing awareness of issues of acceptance which would help to fuel Methodist debates about sexuality and ministry.^{ix}

The 1991 Methodist Conference made it obvious that "[d]eep differences of opinion" within the church were going to make reaching agreement on the ministry of gay and lesbian people very difficult. Led by Ruawai Rakena, Te Taha Maori expressed its support for such ministry. However, after an eight-hour debate marked by high emotion - during which time a male presbyter, Ashley Sedon, declared his identity as a gay man - Tauwiwi members were painfully divided. With no clear consensus the Conference was unable to make a decision on the ordination of gay and lesbian people.^x The Faith and Order Committee was asked to resume work formulating a theological and biblical response to issues of human sexuality.

Before that work could be completed, however, a significant decision was made by the 1993 Conference in response to the New Zealand Human Rights Act. The 1993 Act made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation. While the new law contained an exemption for groups like churches which sought to discriminate on the basis of a deeply-held or religious conviction, supporters of the ordination of gay and lesbian people saw it as an opportunity to bring change to the church.

The matter was brought to Conference and after some debate it was agreed that the Methodist Church would "choose to order its life and practice within the intent of the Act". A supplementary note made it clear that presbyters would continue to be stationed on the basis of matchings with parishes.^{xi} Seeking to clarify the meaning of this resolution early the following year, President Mervyn Dine stated that, in making this decision Conference "chose not to seek legal loopholes or exemptions in order to avoid complying with the intention of the Act to abolish discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation."^{xii}

The Methodist decision to order its life in accord with the Human Rights Act was a critical one. Reflecting on Methodist debates about human sexuality, the religious scholar Douglas Pratt declared that it was this determination that was "the effective decision of principle of the Methodist Conference that asserts the Church's acceptance of gay clergy".^{xiii} Whether at the time every

Methodist saw it as such is debatable,^{xiv} but Pratt observed “every indication” that many within the leadership of the Church firmly believed the decision had now cleared the way for the ordination of gay and lesbian people.^{xv}

Pratt also questioned whether deferring to the secular law in this way had “subverted the proper task of a church community, namely to determine its life and order on the basis of theological rationale”.^{xvi} Methodists are often accused of being pragmatic decision-makers. It can be argued that the 1993 decision was a prime example of the tendency to make decisions on the basis of what would work. Yet, by basing its policy on the law of the State, Conference side-stepped a necessary theological debate on issues of human sexuality. In doing so, Pratt suggested, it devalued its theological integrity and opened the door to litigious dissent. “For when theology fails ... Grace gives way to Law.”^{xvii}

During this period the Faith and Order Committee worked towards providing the church with theological material for its conversations on issues of human sexuality. In 1992 the Committee had been asked to identify areas of “common ground” within the church.^{xviii} Its 1993 papers “Human Sexuality” and “Homosexuality” were not definitive statements but explored common affirmations, the “clouds of fear and distress” that it saw surrounding the current debate and the possible consequences of decision-making. The Committee highlighted the need to resist the pressure to make a decision when there was “clearly no consensus”, noting that this could “provoke disunity at a time when greater understanding and openness and the ability to listen to one another seem to be carrying us forward.”^{xix}

By 1997, however, the pressure to put the church’s 1993 decision of principle into practice was building. In that year David Bromell was nominated for the role of Christchurch Methodist Mission Superintendent. The church’s delay in actioning Bromell’s application to be received into Full Connexion had led him to seek alternative employment in 1993. He agreed to return to Methodist ministry only, he said, “because I was assured that the 1993 Conference had settled [the] issue” of homosexuality and ministry.^{xx}

It quickly became apparent that the issue had not been settled and the nomination caused heated debate in the lead-up to the 1997 Conference. Extensive lobbying throughout the year saw “a hardening of attitudes” as views became increasingly polarised.^{xxi} Proponents of justice and equality for gay and lesbian people lined up against a coalition of evangelical and Pacific Methodists and the debate that took place at Conference was marked by a heightened sense of passion and acrimony. After “many hours of wrestling”,^{xxii} particularly within the Tauwiwi caucus, and by way of a decision-making process which itself would be the subject of some critique,^{xxiii} Conference agreed to receive David Bromell into Full Connexion and to station him as the Superintendent of the Christchurch Methodist Mission.

Dissent and Disruption

This decision unleashed “a storm of dissent, disruption, and legal wrangling” within the Methodist Connexion.^{xxiv} Over the next few years the focus of conversations about the place of gay and lesbian people turned to finding a way to deal with such dissension.

The 1997 Conference identified the need to establish a Presidential Commission representative of the diversity of the church to help individuals and groups who had difficulty in accepting the church’s decision to appoint a gay presbyter. The Commission received over 100 submissions from a range of sources and its 1998 report noted “widespread” hurt within the church as a result of a number of recent Conference decisions. These included the commitment to pursue a bicultural journey, the adoption of consensus decision-making and a perceived move away from scripture and theological orthodoxy.

The Commission sought “a new way forward” for the church and in particular for its evangelical members. Its key recommendations were that Conference enter into an Evangelical Covenant as a way of affirming the place of evangelicals within Methodism and that it establish a new national evangelical structure. This “Evangelical Synod” would, it was suggested, give evangelical people and parishes “a new place to stand” in the life of the church and “a great deal more say in relation to their own life and future”.^{xxv}

Creating a place for evangelicals to stand, however, proved problematic. The 1998 Conference affirmed the Evangelical Covenant and approved in principle the formation of an Evangelical Synod.^{xxvi} Yet, some members voiced concern that the new evangelical structure would erode the Connexional nature of the church by creating sector groups with “the power of veto” and “the ability for separate development”.^{xxvii} Gay and lesbian Methodists expressed particular anxiety lest the new Synod become a space where decisions made in past Conferences would not be respected. In a joint statement to the Conference they argued that the formation of an Evangelical Synod “substantially increased our vulnerability and that of our lesbian sisters and gay brothers within the whole church”. “A decision to provide a place of safety for one group ... at the expense of others’ safety”, they noted, “is not yet justice.”^{xxviii}

Opposition to the new evangelical structure grew throughout 1999 and came to a head at that year’s Conference. A prolonged and often bitter debate reaffirmed the Evangelical Covenant but reached an impasse over the issue of the Evangelical Synod. The Conference’s inability to reach consensus meant that it could make no further decision on the principle of the new structure’s establishment. It formed an Interim Executive of the Evangelical Synod and referred the matter to the President’s Committee of Advice for ongoing dialogue.^{xxix}

This result left many evangelicals feeling angry and betrayed. Some expressed “an inability to trust the Conference, its decision making, policy and theological direction any longer” and made the decision to leave the Methodist Church of New Zealand.^{xxx}

The exact numbers of those who left Methodism are difficult to estimate. By early 2000 it was said that the church had lost 1200 lay members from a number of congregations.^{xxxi} Between 1999 and 2001 Conference received the resignations of more than a dozen evangelical presbyters.^{xxxii} Three congregations left the denomination.^{xxxiii} Some of those who left joined other denominations. Others started new Methodist churches, including the Evangelical Samoan Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand (formed in January 2000) and the Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand (formed in July 2000 under the leadership of the Auckland-based presbyter, Richard Waugh).^{xxxiv}

Preventing any further such splits became a key priority for Connexional leaders. In 2000 the Evangelical Synod proposal was reworked and that year’s Conference agreed to the formation of a national Evangelical Network to support evangelical theology and identity.

The revised structure had its own Superintendent but sat alongside district Synods rather than being an alternative to them. Membership of the Network would no longer be determined by a “potentially divisive” vote but was to be based on the voluntary association of individuals and groups. Seeking to meet concerns raised by gay and lesbian Methodists and others, advocates of the new Network stated that its primary role would be “to support evangelicals rather than to oppose other groups”.^{xxxv} The new Network was officially launched in March 2001.

Debate about the Evangelical Synod had raised the question of whether it was possible for Synods and Advisory Committees to “legally stand apart from a decision of Conference on a matter of conscience based on theological grounds”.^{xxxvi} Reflecting on this issue in its 1999 report the Law Revision Committee declared that Conference decisions were “theoretically, binding on all Conference members including Synods and Advisory Committees”, yet stated somewhat ambiguously that the church was “here dealing not with Conference decisions, but with Tauwi consensus”. For that reason the Committee believed they were best addressed “in terms of the procedures relating to consensus within the Tauwi Caucus.”^{xxxvii}

The notion of allowing groups within Tauwi to in some way stand apart from decisions about the place of gay and lesbian people became a further means of dealing with church conflict and would eventually allow the ordination of gay and lesbian people to proceed.

In 2001 Methodism faced a potential crisis when the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga “started an extraordinary precedence” by inviting disaffected Tongan congregations to come under its oversight and authority.^{xxxviii} The thought of losing large numbers of Tongan members seems to have engendered a sense of urgency within the New Zealand Connexion and led to the

preparation of a negotiated agreement with the Free Wesleyans. Signed by the Presidents of both churches, this document acknowledged Vahefonua Tonga's 'policy on homosexuality'. The policy included its belief that homosexuality was contrary to scripture, statements opposing the acceptance of "self-avowed homosexuals" into ordained ministry or any positions of leadership and a ban on ministers serving Vahefonua congregations conducting ceremonies celebrating homosexual relationships. Declared to be non-negotiable, this agreement helped to staunch the flow of Tongan congregations from the Methodist Church of New Zealand.^{xxxix}

The Memorandum of Understanding

Methodists took a similar approach to dissension when the conversation about the ministry of gay and lesbian people was resumed in 2002. In that year President Norman West asked the Faith and Order Committee to explore whether there was a way in which the Methodist Church could ordain gay and lesbian people. The re-opening of this debate was due, in part, to a recognition that the church could soon be faced with the ordination of an openly lesbian ministry student, Margaret Donald.^{xi}

The Committee's 2003 report "Learning to Listen: Listening to Learn" summarised the diversity that continued to exist within Methodism. Noting that there was no consensus on the issue of homosexuality and ministry, Faith and Order suggested that making progress on the issue might still be feasible. The Committee wondered whether allowing other groups to negotiate the kind of agreement reached by Vahefonua was a possible way forward. Providing such "safeguards and assurances" to those who were opposed to the acceptance of gay clergy might allow Conference to say 'yes' to ordinations. However, the Committee queried whether Methodist polity would allow this "when legally all decisions of Conference are binding on all individuals and groups". Such a move, it noted, would require "a departure from our polity" and "a reconsideration of our understanding of connexionalism".^{xii}

Debate at the 2003 Conference was marked by a new level of good will and "a genuine effort [on the part of members] to listen to each other and work through issues together".^{xiii} After considerable deliberation and negotiation, Conference agreed that the ordination of gay and lesbian people would proceed provided that a memorandum of understanding was prepared which respected and acknowledged those who did not support such a move. It was anticipated that such an agreement would protect "unity and difference" by enabling "all people across the spectrum of belief [to] stand with integrity within the life of the Church".^{xiii}

The Memorandum of Understanding was prepared the following year and signed in November 2004 by representatives of the diversity of the Connexion.^{xiv} An attempt to enable people with "markedly different beliefs to remain in relationship with each other",^{xv} the memorandum was based on a spirit of compromise. It allowed the ordination of gay and lesbian people to proceed but made no strong statement affirming their ministry. Instead it acknowledged the continuing opposition of members of Tauivi to the acceptance of gay ministry while seeking to reassure them by affirming such things as the church's criteria for ordination, the practice of matching in the stationing process and the Ethical Standards for Ministry.^{xvi}

Reflecting on the way the Memorandum might be received, President Lynne Frith suggested the document probably wouldn't satisfy everybody.^{xvii} However, it did allow the church to move forward on an issue that had been a cause of bitter contention since the early 1990s. In 2004 the Methodist Church ordained Margaret Donald and in 2010 it ordained two more openly gay presbyters while receiving another gay presbyter into Full Connexion. Over time a number of other already-ordained gay and lesbian clergy came 'out of the closet' and affirmed their identity, as would growing numbers of gay and lesbian lay people. By 2013 it would be possible to see gay leadership evident "at nearly every level of the Church's life".^{xviii}

The Methodist Presidency

One significant area of church leadership remained closed to gay and lesbian people. In 2005 Conference debated the possible selection of a lesbian presbyter as President of the Methodist Church.

Diana Tana, Tumuaki of Te Taha Maori since 2001, was the sole nomination for the position of

President in 2005. Her name generated intense debate within the Tauwi caucus and further “difficult and prolonged deliberations” within the 5+5 Conference selection panel.^{xix} The panel was unable to reach consensus and reported to the Conference that it had no recommendation for the roles of President or Vice-President. For the first time in the history of New Zealand Methodism the newly-inducted Presidential team, John Salmon and Mary West, was faced with the need to stay in their roles for a two-year term.

One of the arguments used by Methodists who opposed Tana’s nomination was that it was too soon for the church to select a gay or lesbian President. The time, they said, was not yet right. However, the outcome of the 2005 Conference left those who were hoping the Memorandum of Understanding “had achieved a wide-ranging tolerance of difference ... on the range of issues relating to sexuality, ministry and leadership” feeling that the church had fallen short of its commitment to inclusiveness.ⁱ Hui Poari voiced its disappointment after the 2005 Conference by asking the question, “Would Tauwi accept a gay or lesbian person as President or Vice President?” This was a challenge Tauwi would struggle with for another decade.

The 2005 debate gave gay and lesbian Methodists “renewed energy for working for greater equality” for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people [LGBTs] within and beyond the church. This led to the formation of the GLAM (Gay Lesbian and Methodist) network in November 2005.ⁱⁱ

GLAM began as a confidential email link and included those who were open about their sexuality and those who were not. It gave LGBT Methodists a means of support and communication and helped to increase their visibility. In 2006 the network started holding an annual GLAM dinner for members and their friends at Methodist Conference. In 2008 GLAM held its first Communion service at Conference describing this as an act of hospitality. “It was to be an offering in grace for anyone to come and receive”, noted one GLAM member, “a way of saying that we asked no more of the Church but that it also be open in grace to us.”ⁱⁱⁱ The service was well-received and in 2013 became an official part of the Conference timetable.

Conclusion

From the early 1960s Methodist conversations about the place of gay and lesbian people in the life of the church and community touched on issues of decriminalisation, discrimination, ordination and leadership. These conversations were passionate and often acrimonious and exposed tensions and divisions within the denomination.

The Conference’s decisions of 1993 and 1997 were seen by advocates of the acceptance of gay and lesbian clergy as a victory for justice and inclusiveness. For some evangelical and Pacific members these decisions fed into a growing discontent about the perceived liberalism of the denomination and led to the painful fracturing of New Zealand Methodism.

In the twenty-first century Methodist conversations have continued, moving into such areas as same-sex marriage, sexual ethics and gender and sexual identity. These conversations continue to challenge Methodists as they seek to respond to diverse calls for justice and acceptance, Biblical and religious truth and grace in living with difference.

ⁱ *Minutes of the Annual Conference (MAC)*, 1961, pp.94-96.

ⁱⁱ *MAC*, 1985, pp.91-96.

ⁱⁱⁱ “The Church and Homosexuality” (1985) in *MAC*, 1991, pp.268-71.

^{iv} See *MAC*, 1985, p.638, Resolution 4 & *Ibid.*, 1986, p.216.

^v *MAC*, 1990, pp.249-60 & pp.661-63.

^{vi} Interestingly, there was substantial support at the parish level for the acceptance of homosexual people as church members. *Ibid.*, 1991, p.262.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 1986, p.216.

^{viii} The Fijian, Tongan and Samoan members of the General Purposes Committee affirmed their opposition to the acceptance of gay and lesbian people into ordained ministry in 1990. *Ibid.*, 1990, p.249.

^{ix} David Bromell, Felix Donnelly, Willem Hein & Rosemary Neave, *Love Unbounded: On Being Gay or Lesbian and Christian*, Colcom Press, Red Beach, 1991.

^x *MAC*, 1991, p.644.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, 1993, pp.696-97.

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- xii Mervyn Dine & Geoffrey Peak, "Human Rights Act 1993", 18 January 1994, (held by the author).
- xiii Douglas Pratt, "An Ecclesial Dilemma: Homosexual Affirmation and Church Process", *Colloquium*, 39/1 2007, p.51.
- xiv See Evangelical Caucus Leaders, "Message to all Conference Members", 10 November 1997, p.1, (held by the author).
- xv Pratt, "An Ecclesial Dilemma", p. 50. This was certainly the view taken by David Bromell and other gay and lesbian Methodists.
- xvi *Ibid.*, p.51.
- xvii Douglas Pratt, "Homosexuality and Theological Crisis: A Doctrinal Critique", *Colloquium*, 40/1 2008, p.87.
- xviii *MAC*, 1992, p.694.
- xix *Ibid.*, 1993, p.81.
- xx David Bromell, "A Personal Response" in "Affirmation" (unpublished manuscript).
- xxi Norman E. Brookes, "To Conference Members: A Pastoral Letter", 9 October 1997, (held by the author).
- xxii Norman E. Brookes, "Pastoral Letter from the President, Rev. Norman Brookes", 12 November 1997, (held by the author).
- xxiii See Pratt, "An Ecclesial Dilemma", pp.44-46 for a discussion of the decision-making process used to receive Bromell into Full Connexion.
- xxiv *Ibid.*, p.36.
- xxv *MAC*, 1998, pp.349-62.
- xxvi *Ibid.*, p.759.
- xxvii Graham Weir, "Recognising the Reality - Responding in Faith", [1998], (unpublished manuscript).
- xxviii David Bromell, Margaret Donald, Ashley Sedon, "Statement to Conference 1998", (held by the author).
- xxix David Bush & Nicola Grundy, "A Pastoral Letter to the Church", 8 December 1999, (held by the author).
- xxx Marion Peterson, "Report to the Church from the Post Conference Meeting of the Interim Executive of the Evangelical Synod", 9 December 1999, (held by the author).
- xxxi "Wesleyan Methodist Movement" (unpublished manuscript), March 2000, (held by the author).
- xxxii *MAC*, 1999, p.727; 2000, p.R-3; and 2001, p.S-3.
- xxxiii David Bush, conversation with the author, 8 July 2015.
- xxxiv David Bush, "Pastoral Letter from the President", [1999], (held by the author); and Philip English, "Methodist group breaks away over gay wrangle", *NZ Herald*, (no date).
- xxxv *MAC*, 2000, pp.L-13-23.
- xxxvi *Ibid.*, 1998, p.760.
- xxxvii *Ibid.*, 1999, p.333.
- xxxviii *Ibid.*, 2001, p.I-4.
- xxxix "The Vahefonua (Uesiliana) Tonga-o-Aotearoa, New Zealand Policy on Homosexuality", (no date), (held by the author).
- xl Donald was received as a candidate in 1999 and
- xli *MAC*, 2003, pp.F-2-5.
- xlii Diana Tana quoted in Paul Titus, "Methodists move toward gay ordination", *Touchstone*, December 2003, p.7.
- xliii "Methodists move forward on ordination of gay and lesbian people", (media release), 11 November 2003, (held by the author).
- xliv Signatories were Lynne Frith (President), Diana Tana (Tumuaki, Te Taha Maori), John Murray (Executive Officer Tauwi Strategy and Stationing), Susau Strickland (Co-Convenor, Wasewase Ko Viti Kei Rotuma e Niu Siladi), 'Epeli Taungapeau (Superintendent, Vahefonua Tonga), Iakopo Fa'afuata (Superintendent, Sinoti Samoa) and Nigel Hanscamp (Superintendent, Evangelical Network).
- xlv Quoted in "Methodists say yes to ordaining homosexuals", *New Zealand Herald*, 15 September 2004.
- xlvi "Memorandum of Understanding", 5 November 2004, (held by the author).
- xlvii Paul Titus, "Path clear to ordain gays and lesbians", *Touchstone*, October 2004, p.2.
- xlviii Susan Thompson, "GLAM Sermon", 8 October 2013, (held by the author).
- xliv Helen Laurenson to Members of the Executive, Auckland Synod, 22 November 2005, (held by the author).
- ¹ Ken Russell, "Presidency Consensus and Justice", online, 2005, available at www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz/.../presidency_consensus_justice.html, accessed 3 July 2015.
- ^{li} Susan Thompson, "Post-Methodist Conference", 16 November 2005, (held by the author).
- ^{lii} Thompson, "GLAM Sermon", 8 October 2013, (held by the author).

SYNOD REPORTS

AUCKLAND MANUKAU

Since meeting together in March, the Synods have met independently and twice together. Much discussion has taken place about when or if we will become one Synod. It is not economical in its present form as our Superintendent is doubling her efforts in time and energy to serve the two Synods. This is becoming unnecessarily stressful. A planning day for executive members of both Synods is anticipated to be held in November.

As with other Synods attendance at many Parish Council meetings for reviews and profiles, has kept the Superintendent team busy. Discussion times with presbyters, who have prepared profiles for Stationing, have also been time consuming.

Auckland Synod is attempting to be forward looking in developing a strategy, but positive steps here will take time and education. Already, one 'wealthy' parish has declined the suggestions that Mission Resourcing and Auckland Synod proposed for expansion into new and developing areas.

We are disappointed that some presbyters are so limited in their availability for stationing and some say 'no' to requests from Synod when trying to help provide stable ministry for a reasonable term – 5yrs minimum.

MASPAC is active in developing a robust policy to assist parishes who are having difficulty in financing major deferred maintenance issues. They are also having discussion with parishes about seismic policy, as many parishes are still anxious about these issues. Some have progressed to the next step – DEE reports so they have some idea of the costs involved to strengthen their buildings.

During the course of the year, many hours have been clocked up by the members of MASPAC and their commitment and work is very much appreciated. Over recent years, MASPAC has developed a 'team' environment and culture, in working together to support and future proof parishes in the region. In 2016 Rev Keith Taylor is retiring from the position of Convenor. At present, members of the Synod are searching for a replacement person. They may consider remodelling MASPAC as Keith has given so much to this position, well beyond what we can expect from another convenor. Keith will be acknowledged for his tireless work in April 2016.

Both our Area Superintendents are retiring from their roles at the end of the Connexional Year. Christine Peak has given the synod so much time, faithful and wise counsel over the time she has been in this role and we are glad that she will now have more time to spend with Brian at the beach. Esme has been diligent in her role and is now entering a life of study as well as working fulltime. Our blessings go with them.

WAIKATO WAIARIKI

Relationships

The Waikato-Waiariki Synod Executive believes that Synod exists to serve the parishes and those offering ministry within the District. Inevitably this involves attending to a certain amount of church business. We spend time thinking strategically, preparing and processing reports and trying to meet various wider church expectations.

All of these things are important yet more is needed if the church is to thrive in its mission. The Waikato-Waiariki Synod has always had a strong focus on building relationships for mutual support, resourcing and inspiration. This has remained our priority in 2015.

The Synod has a full diary of planned events giving people opportunities to gather for times of worship, professional development and fellowship. Inductions, training events, Ministerial Synod workshops, Synod Refresh, Wesley Day services and supernumerary lunches have been well-attended throughout the year. The introduction of Synod Quiet Days offering times of spiritual refreshment at Epworth has been a new initiative.

Synod members also gather informally to offer each other pastoral support. The www women's group meets at Tirau and includes lay and ordained women who are active in ministry. The Brewersgate group has a long history and continues to meet in Hamilton. Both groups extend an invitation to members of our partner churches working in ecumenical contexts and they often express their appreciation for the friendship and hospitality they find.

The shared leadership offered to the District by the Synod Superintendent, Steward and all the members of the Executive also helps to build relationships. A team of people undertake a variety of Synod tasks, sharing their special gifts in many different settings. We encourage new members of Synod to gradually find their place in this work often by being alongside a more experienced person who can act as a mentor.

LOWER NORTH ISLAND

**Please note the numbers used in this report, while based on best available data, are challengeable, and have not been independently verified.*

Aspirations

LNIS has a commendable set of aspirations for the present year, and has written out and had adopted worthwhile and measurable objectives... but none of us now believe they are achievable. We'd love to be offering material and programs to parishes and to our (few) presbyters and deacons, even a newsletter or two. But...we've made some other progress:

- So far we have been able to do almost all the things the Connexion has asked – reports, make comments, budget and representation.
- After a few years of “out of order” on the bookkeeping, we're finally all coded and balanced and meeting deadlines for IRD and Connexion and Charities Services.
- Although not yet all in one place, we've now got most of the material we need for a directory of contacts, but we've started from so far behind.
- We have hosted a very successful collegial workshop on “Death Dying and the Funeral” for those who minister to Methodists; we are planning another.
- We are currently taking registrations for a LNIS Regional Youth Camp at Waikanae, to be held this Labour Weekend... plan to be young.

The most passionate debate in LNIS, at every meeting, for two years now, is the right of non-English speaking congregations to align themselves with any parish and thus any synod they wish... many speakers think that the connexion should butt out. Many wonder how it is the LINS parishes that have been targeted.

Just 14 of our 44 parishes are served by Methodist Presbyters in Full Connexion, including 4 where that Presbyter is a supernumerary part time.

In our Synod there are just 7 full time stipended Methodist Presbyters, 2 part timers including one as a Co-superintendent, 3 working Supernumeraries, lots of Presbyterians and several Anglicans.

The metaphor for LNIS IN 2015 is struggle.

- LNIS is struggling to matter to its constituent parishes, and it seems to matter very little to their congregations.
- Ian, Ron and David are struggling to keep up, and are significantly under-resourced for what is required.
- Jenny our Synod Secretary has struggled with illness, with a demolished shoulder, and with too many superintendents!

We are tied up by the complexity and the sheer number of the arrangements that the Synod and its predecessors have put in place: So many of these arrangements are high-maintenance. Synod officers are constantly tending to those relationships. Compounding this has been that the change to having 3 Co-superintendents has meant that there are three people whose job it is to be worried about those relationships – and then they have to keep each other informed. Emailarrhoea

Arrangements Needing Managing

Only Napier is a straight Methodist Parish staffed by a fulltime Methodist presbyter.

Every other parish has one or more of the following arrangements

1. 35 Cooperating Ventures – requiring regional forum, parish review (planned and negotiated), ministry extension (planned and negotiated), ministry reviews (planned and negotiated), change of coordinating partner for oversight (endlessly discussed, and hopelessly understaffed.. how can we possibly offer oversight to the up to dozen parishes about to/duel to/contemplating coming over to us.)
2. 3 straight Methodist parishes, where ministry is nevertheless provided by either the Anglicans or Presbyterians under a LEP (Local Ecumenical) for mission agreement.
3. 10 of the CV parishes are linked to another parish with/by at least a shared ministry
4. 3 Methodist Manawatu parishes are served regionally and by agreement with the Palmerston North parish
5. At least 9 parishes where there is a formal/informal arrangement with Vahefonua or Sinoti for shared ministry and/or premises
6. A parish which is confederation of multiple congregations - Hutt City Uniting Congregations
7. 13 parishes employing a part time minister
8. 8 parishes where the main worship leader is lay
9. 8 parishes where the main leader is an Anglican clergy person, in at least three of those the Diocese/Bishop is not respecting UCANZ Guide to Procedures.
10. There are 11 parishes where there is currently no minister appointed, though 4 have supernumerary supply. Only 2 are in this Stationing round.
11. Levin, Milson, Palmerston North, ABP, Marton and Feilding, Wanganui, St James Masterton, Featherston are all likely to be looking for a minister under the Methodist system
12. At least two parish supported by A Local Shared Ministry Team, with a retained enabler.

And 19 parishes that haven't been represented at synod meetings in the last 2 years by lay or clergy.

Tired

The Synod executive is tired. The Superintendents are somewhat dispirited after 6 months. Recently when the draft Synod Objectives for next year were circulated following a workgroup, two Exec members announced their immediate retirement, two others said they would serve just one more year, another one said those are "good objectives for the co-superintendents to implement". Just before the August Synod, 3 of the 5 office holders were heard to contemplate resigning/not standing.

Parochialism

The LNIS Synod is still shaped by the vestiges of the 3 Districts that formed it... some who think things were done better in the Hawkes Bay/Wanganui/Wellington (delete the other 2!), and some who jealously guard the geographic limits on the buckets of reserves earmarked solely for use in one of the three.

Loss Making

While we still have some \$700,000 invested through MTA and CB&L, we've drawn down some \$60,000 or \$70,000 in the last three years to meet our operating costs... stipend, honoraria, mileage.

The Synod is stuck on regional church levies... nearly all of our largest parishes (measured by roll size and by income) are not giving us levies. We're spending a great deal of time discussing objections to the suggested levies and the system mostly from the big parishes. We are a very long way from agreement. It is difficult to build positive relationships with parishes when we have to debate with them over money.

We have many buildings closed following seismic risk assessment. Some are rebuilding; some sold; some frozen. In so many of them there is negotiation with the Presbytery Central who haven't yet set themselves up to talk with partners about Property.

We have a significant number of parishes that would seek to operate more and more congregationally – paying just lip service to regional and national church. Several congregations are hostile to the Methodist Church of NZ. Quite a few of the Executive think we should withdraw from the Union/CV parishes in those places.

An enormous amount of time is spent trying to work with the Presbyterians. The (late) Wellington Presbytery reportedly found it very hard to work with its neighbouring Presbyteries, let alone with us... and struggled sometimes to consult with their own parishes. With the notable exception of in Taranaki, we have struggled to get the attention of any Anglican leadership, let alone agreement on the application of the UCANZ procedures.

We have at least 18 parishes trying to sell or close or strengthen one or more buildings.

We have at least 2 (P.Nth and Mangapapa) contemplating building larger worship/parish centre space.

We have at least 4 parishes which are contemplating closing down one or more congregations.

We don't have but would benefit from having

- Residential August Synod
- Synod Strategy Days
- Mentoring:
- Church development/planting/new ventures:- “Sow and Grow”
- Any focus on Future Leadership
- Programs to “let the children live”
- Programs to recruit candidates for ministry

We shall overcome. Deep in our hearts, we do believe, we shall overcome one day.

NELSON MARLBOROUGH WEST COAST

Synod Leadership 2016

August Synod confirmed the 2016 leadership team as:

- David Poultney – Superintendent, Synod Steward – Jean Faithful,
- Assistant Superintendents - Thelma Efford - West Coast, David Martin – Nelson/Tasman, and Ian Boddy – Marlborough.
- Don Horne – Treasurer
- Lyn Heine – Alpine Presbytery representative
- Barbara Watson – Nelson region representative

Property Update

August Synod was held in the newly opened Stoke complex which is a wonderful tribute to a vital congregation who had a vision and went for it after receiving a disastrous earthquake report on their church building.

The Motueka Church strengthening has also just been completed and looks superb. It was fitting that the first service in the church was that of a long time member who was just short of her 101st birthday.

Reefton, with the help of a Development Funds Property grant obtained an engineer's structural assessment report which took them from 21%NBS to 67%NBS. This has been a fantastic result for the whole community in Reefton as they are now able to use their hall after a year out of it.

CENTRAL SOUTH ISLAND

Christchurch Central Parish

The issue here is that what is needed does not fit into any current model for stationing. At the moment we are finding our way together with Mission Resourcing, fine-tuning the strategic plan and integrating the work the Mary Caygill has been doing, the shifting sands of the inner city development and the development of the site at Durham Street. Alongside this, we are developing

a profile (job description) that is open and flexible enough for something quite unique and new to develop as an appropriate inner city Methodist ministry.

Financing this project will need a very clear strategy in order for the best possible chance for success – this includes a working budget in addition to the stipend that allows for the ministry to become predominantly self-sustaining. This work is also underway and is using as a model, the City Chaplain ministry in Auckland.

Finally, the last piece of work that will need to be done before an appointment is made, is for a way of having the needs of the parish met internally – ie. pastoral care, some of the worship, administration and council leadership so that the new appointee is released to do the ministry he or she has been asked to do – and to ensure that ministry expectations are very clear of the incumbent, and of the parish.

Port Hills Uniting Parish – an amalgamation of Sumner, Redcliffes, Lyttleton Union Parish and Port Hills Presbyterian Church. The parish has indicated that they no longer have use for the Sumner or Lyttleton properties and have no plans to engage in ministry in either of these areas in the future. Presbytery and Synod have met and agree that these are areas of huge potential and worthy of being retained at this time. The process continues (after much debate) for Port Hills to divest itself of these properties and for Opawa Community Church to take over the Methodist Chapel in Lyttleton and grow and nurture ministry in that area. The Presbyterian property will return to Presbytery to utilize in the appropriate way according to their rules and regulations. The property held at Sumner will return to the oversight of either Presbytery or Synod who will manage the current users to cover any costs needed (rates, insurance etc) and form a Joint Use Agreement so that either or both denominations might, in the near future, establish a new independent ministry.

Opawa – Looking at increasing its ministry area to include Lyttleton should the Port Hills Parish release the property there.

Ashburton – Ashburton have committed themselves to full time ministry for a further 2 years. The church is experiencing growth and is currently working on its strategic plan.

St. David's Union Parish Ashburton - The Presbyterian Church is the coordinating partner. Henry Mbambo has recently been inducted. Excellent energy in this parish which is very ready to move forward under his leadership.

Oamaru – is in a period of transition as major property issues are addressed.

Other Plans for 2015-2017

Predominant focus for 2015/2016 is relationship building – Visits to Parish Services and joining in Parish Council meetings are going well. It has given some interesting insights into the passion, direction, leadership, and mission each Parish has... or not!

Visits by the synod superintendent have proved very helpful for long term thinking about planning and strategy.

Synod Strategy Days – 2 have been held and were not well attended. Energy for the Synod Strategy is very low – primarily due to parishes working on their own strategic plan and many in the middle of their building projects. There is a plan for a Strategic Plan review day next year.

Mentoring: Growing and strengthening the relationships across parishes continues– with some mentoring set up for some, long term training opportunities explored for others and opportunities for people to contribute to the Synod.

Church development/planting/new ventures: - “Sow and Grow”

Synod Superintendent is working closely with New Suburbs Coordinator and Presbytery looking at a strategy plan to grow and sow new expressions of church in places like Rolleston, Sumner,

Lyttleton, Halswell – where there are “remnants” of something now past but needs a different kind of presbyteral/lay led leadership and funding.

Long term sustainability of Synod Superintendency and ongoing work of the Synod:

Like most parishes, the Synod is experiencing “cash flow” issues – i.e. not enough cash flow. With no provision for long term stipend for the superintendent, office staff or even an office and parishes struggling to meet their levies (even though these have been lowered), this is a concern that the Synod needs to address in the coming 18 months. The recent Superintendents retreat was helpful in identifying some ideas that have yet to be explored.

OTAGO SOUTHLAND

Synod is happy to report improving contact with the local Presbytery.

In Alexandra, Andrew Howley is settling well and the ¾ time will become fulltime next year.

Bluff is showing an increase in children and young families.

In Dunedin a parish review took place in the autumn.

Invercargill is seeing outreach in a local community choir; the op-shop has a new venture.

Otatara is still seeking a ½ time appointment, but a solution may be in sight.

Tokomairiro is embarking upon new local ecumenical ventures.

SINOTI SAMOA

Sinoti Samoa had its Annual Meeting from 16-19 July in Wellington. This began with the Ministerial Synod on Thursday where all presbyters, leaders and their spouses came together for theological reflection, sharing and discussion of topics concerning the Ministry and other matters from Connexion.

Theme of Sinoti 2015: ‘God of Hope, empower us with Your vision’

This was the focus of all discussion, reflections, worship and synod this year. The Official opening ceremony took place on Friday evening led by the Wellington Combined Youth, followed by a Tausala Fundraiser for our Sinoti Hall Project. Donations from 21 Parishes of Sinoti towards this project came to \$76,965.90.

Sinoti 2015:

At our annual Sinoti meeting there was a lot of discussion as highlighted below:

- **Stand-alone Superintendency (SAS)** – we are grateful to the PAC Distribution Group for the endowment we received which has enabled us to move forward. A committee was formed to prepare a strategy plan and oversee the implementation. Sinoti has agreed for a SAS to commence work on 1 February 2017 half time.
- **Parish Review Process** – there has been a process put in place for reviews of 1st year and 5th year in Parishes. Two reviews will be taking place early next year.
- **Think Tank** – from this discussion paper of the church, Sinoti has moved to create its own ‘TOFA MAMAO’ visioning group that will help with church growth. Their main task is to work closely with the Conveners and different Committees for the success of the Sinoti Vision and to look into Mission projects that will lead Sinoti into the future.
- **Lead Worship 1 & 2 Courses** – this is continuing within Sinoti Parishes where lay people are offering to become lay preachers. 5 new accredited lay preachers were presented with Certificates recently.
- **Christian Education** – Sinoti Samoa Sunday School national exams took place on the last Saturday of July and youth (Autalavou) exams are on the 20th of September. There has also been a review on the curriculum used by the Christian Education Committee to resource our children and youth, and as a result Sinoti will revert back to resources based on the Bible. The importance of the Samoan Language is taught in our Sunday school.
- **Social Issues** – workshops are continuing for this year throughout Sinoti.
- **Sinoti Constitution Review** – A committee is working on this, and their first draft will be presented at its Executive meeting in September. Their work is aligned with the Law Book of the MCNZ. Hopefully this work will be completed to be affirmed and adopted at Sinoti 2016.
- **Tupulaga Talavou [Youth]** - there was a large delegation at Sinoti this year from our young people. They had Leadership Training follow up on Thursday and then a meeting for their Resolutions for Sinoti meeting in the weekend. They brought to floor of Sinoti some

resolutions which were all agreed upon. One of these was an encouragement to Sinoti to organise, prepare and acknowledge and continue programmes for children and youth to put in action for the 10 year focus of the church – ‘Let the Children Live’. They also wanted to change Section 9 of our Sinoti constitution regarding ‘Youth’ to give space for them to hold their national camps every two years starting 2017.

Sinoti acknowledged the wonderful work of our two National Youth Liaison Officers (NYLO) Filo Tu and Lynley Tai as their term ends this year, and welcome the next two new leaders for the next 3 year term.

- **Overseas Seminars** - We heard from our Guest Speakers Tumema Faioso and Ruta Faafuata who went to Cambodia for the YATRA seminar and Liluokalani Teofilo who went to Switzerland for the Green Churches seminar held at Bossey Ecumenical Institute. We were grateful that our Sinoti young people were selected to represent Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa in these workshops. They talked about their wonderful experiences and learning from where they went.
- **Office Bearers 2015-2018** - Sinoti had its election of office bearers, not only for the office of Sinoti but for all its committees for the next 3 year term. After the election, 3 women were elected to lead our Sinoti – Suiva’aia Te’o (Superintendent), Itamua Mataiva Robertson (Secretary) and Saunoa Tulou (Treasurer).
- **Acknowledgements** - We acknowledged Lani Tupu, and Aso Samoa Saleupolu who held positions of leadership in Sinoti for many years, and have done great things for Sinoti and its life. We wished them well and God’s blessings for their retirement.

VAHEFONUA TONGA

Theme for the Year “Laumālie ‘Evangelio’ “Holy Spirit Evangelise” this is used on our Daily Reading, Falengameesi for the July – December Edition.

From this main theme, our monthly theme for the year are derived, e.g “Holy Spirit Evangelise the Church, Family etc”

Relationship with other Conference, Synods and Parish/Congregations

Vahefonua will be focusing on building a closer relationship with other Synods, Parishes/ Congregations with Tongan members.

Close relationship with the Tongan Methodist Church Conference. The Superintendent and Secretary and Parish Superintendents, Presbyters together with one Choir accompanied the NZ Methodist Conference, President Rev Tovia Aumua to the Coronation and Conference in Tonga.

Synod, Parishes and Strategy

The Vahefonua Tonga or Tongan Synod works closely with three parishes of nineteen congregations in Auckland-Manukau region, three in the Waikato/Wairiki Synod area, one at the Hawkes Bay/Bay of Plenty Synod region, seven at the Lower North Island Synod region, one at the Nelson/Marlborough region, one at the Canterbury Synod region, and two at the Otago-Southland Synod region.

Vahefonua Tonga is working on how it could best deal with some Parishes and Stationing needs or issues.

Auckland-Manukau Tongan Parish has 16 congregations. The Parish Superintendent is the only full-time stipended position at this parish. The rest are served by eleven ordained presbyters, two probationers and one lay-pastor are all on a part-time non-stipend allowance. This situation must wisely be addressed collectively by the parish and simultaneously by the sixteen individual sixteen congregations. There is one deacon on probation also non-stipend part-time.

There are three parsonages in the parish of which only one complies with Conference requirements. The remaining twelve presbyters live in their own home or rent. The parish and its congregations must seriously consider investing on buying homes for parsonages or negotiating and utilising any parsonage of other parishes/synod or connexional body which may be available.

There are two other parishes with fulltime stipend provided. One is the Lotofale'ia Mangere Tongan Methodist Parish and the other is the Tongan Congregation of the multicultural Wellington Methodist Parish. The former has no parsonage while the latter has one and it meets the conference requirements and standards.

Gisborne and Christchurch are two single congregation parishes, and both provide half-time stipend with parsonages.

Other single congregation parishes are Palmerston North Kelesi Parish served by a Lay-Pastor and Lower Hutt Ututa'u Parish is served by an ordained presbyter who has a full-time secular job. Neither has a parsonage.

Oamaru Tongan congregation has been replanted and is gradually growing. Conversation with the parish council and local synod will take place in the near future.

At stationing there are issues that must be wisely considered and were brought to the attention of the presbyters at the recent ministerial synod. For presbyters who are on full-time or half-time stipend, what are their expectations? Is it acceptable to them to be stationed to a lesser stipended stationing when there are other equally good non-stipended part-time presbyters available for full-time ministry also?

The right of the ten year stationing for the individual presbyter has its many benefits but the stationing of a presbyter longer than four or five years to a large extent does restrict the flexibility and mobility of stationing within the Vahefonua Tonga Ministry.

Vahefonua Tonga is looking forward to building good working relationships with all synods, and parishes which have a Tongan congregation. It is aware that currently there are at least four Tongan congregations which either has no or detached or associated relationship with Vahefonua Tonga. The longest existed of those is in Auckland, (20+ years), one in Waikato, two in the Lower North Island.

Methodist ethos, ethical standards, good governance practices, accountability, transparency and good stewardship of resources are very much needed to be improved, more visual and explicit especially in the bigger and biggest Tongan parishes. Parishes which directly or indirectly play employer roles through contracts with Ministry of Education are ensured to be monitored and supported. Risk Management training would be helpful.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand must be praised and congratulated in its leadership on two ministry areas; the cultural-ethnic specific synods and also its commitment to Bi-Cultural Journey towards a Multicultural Church. Is it time to consider a more seamless and lesser discriminating stationing practice? Why can Pasifika presbyters in recent decades minister to English-speaking parishes, but a non-Pasifika presbyter is yet to be stationed to a Pasifika synod or parish? What are the factors that would improve relationships between respective Tauwi Synods and Parishes with Te Taha Maori and Rohe?

Sunday School

Training of Sunday School teachers nationwide for the new curriculum and also getting reading for the National Annual Examination will take place in October.

The Annual Retreat for the Sunday School Teacher representing every Congregation will take place in January 2016. We are looking for a bigger venue for the long weekend and also one that will accommodate 1500+ participants.

School of Theology

We offer two schools of theology for Presbyters and their wives and also the stewards and their wives every year.

Both schools of Theology have taken place.

The last school of Theology was last weekend at Camp Morley with the stewards and their assistance and wives attended the weekend retreat.

We were overjoyed that Rev Dr Nāsili Vaka'uta and Rev Dr Jione Havea made themselves available to bless the retreat with several sessions.

Evangelism

Increasing numbers of churches are offering their evangelist team to lead worship and open-air worship at Prisons; Mt Eden and Paremoremo is attended to every Sunday by different teams.

We are seeking permission to expand our mission to Wiri Prison and Springhill.

There are also teams attending the Flea Markets on Saturday and Sunday to lead worship and preach the good news.

Labour Weekend Camps

Synod Evangelism team is having programmes fine-tuned and workshop ready to start at the beginning of September for Camp leaders of all congregations. We also have our mission and youth contributing to the programmes so it can offer varieties to all members young and old. Most Camps are held at church halls. Mission representatives are tasked to other congregations to share and present the different programs they offer, ranging from suicide prevention, health, violence, gambling, education etc.

Youth

Youth Outreach Camp – Battle for the Truth Part III: BUILD A BRIDGE AND GET OVER IT was a success. This was held at Ngaruawahia. There were 330 + youth members who attended. Registration was \$220 each person but that did not stop churches paying for youth member representatives. It was a success, many witnessed the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and many were slain by the Spirit. Call to the altar, registered 181 commitments, weekly sessions are offered for them and this provision was increased from the 6 weeks to 12 weeks.

There will be a Sport Camp at Willow Park Eastern Beach later in the year.

Mission and Education

Vahefonua Tonga Mission (Siaola) is working collaboratively with the "TOKO COLLABORATIVE" a suicide prevention charitable organisation in running workshops with the congregations and communities in increasing awareness and what to do and who to seek help from at prevention, intervention, and postvention stages in relation to suicidal signs and or early indicators.

Talanoa Health (Health Awareness to Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, Dialysis etc) also working with Siaola to schedule a programme for their visit to different churches. This is a group of Tongan Doctors and health representatives with the aim to talk and raise awareness amongst their people.

Homework Centres.

Homework centres started last year with the intention to increase academic achievements especially in numeracy and literacy. This is also an extension for the younger children, the chance to learn their Sunday School syllabus and to maintain using and practising their Tongan language.

Fanongo ki he Ui (Listen to the Call)

Listen to the call, programme for young and all families. Workshops such as budgeting, relationship and communications, family violence, parenting are among the programmes that have started for the group.

Presbyter Review - there has been a process put in place for reviews of 1st year probationer and 3rd year Presbyters.

Review of some Constitution – Vahefonua in July has tasked a group to be appointed as a Task Group to work on a discussion paper from the Superintendent. Draft will be presented to the Executive Committee and also to the Law Revision. Their work is aligned with the Law Book of the MCNZ. This will be reported back to the March 2016 Synod.

Building Projects.

Vahefonua is working with 6 different building projects that are multi-million dollar. This varies from Church buildings and hall to Social Housing Units.

Vahefonua would like to acknowledge Property Committee and Central South Island Synod for their benevolence gift of allocating \$1 mil towards the Project at Cnr of Selwyn and Sommerset, Christchurch Building and restoration project.

Other Challenges

Vahefonua strives to maintain and increase youth awareness and support against alcohol, drugs, suicide and promotes Education and Employment Training as practical and long term solutions against POVERTY and all types and forms of ABUSE. Annual Educational and Employment Training Expo is held in January or February each year. Roadshows are arranged for other centres.

The need to identify and support victims of family violence.

Other challenges are the increase in needs and demand for space to worship and the financing of projects.

The increase of awareness of earthquake reports to older church buildings currently in use.

WASEWASE KO VITI KEI ROTUMA

Wasewase Ministerial meeting was held at 409 Great South Road on Friday 16th July and the AGM on Saturday at Meadowlands, Auckland.

Tabacakacaka o Waikato/Waiariki

A proposal for a ½ stipend presbyter for the Wellington Fijian Congregation was approved by the Wellington Wesley Parish. Changes have been made to this proposal to include Wanganui and New Plymouth Fijian congregations with a full time presbyter instead of ½ stipend by 2017. Discussions are still underway with the Wesley Parish.

Suggested decisions:

1. That the report be received.
2. Conference asks Faith & Order to produce a paper on Leadership in the Church and report to Conference 2017.
3. Conference agrees to amend the wording contained in Property Information Leaflet 40, Clause 3.4.2 (b) on page 14. The word **property** shall be deleted from the second reference to “regional **property** strategy” to read:

(b) after five years from the date of sale if the parish has not ensured the use of the remainder of the funds in furtherance of the mission of the Church as set out in the regional property strategy the funds are to be released to the Synod for its use in the regional [delete: property] strategy.

EVANGELICAL NETWORK

The Evangelical Network seems to have periods of intense activity followed by periods where not much seems to be going on: at the moment things are very quiet on the stationing front, with no call for our services in any of the stationing processes this time around. There are no big rallies, conferences or gatherings in the immediate future, and at the moment anyway, only the Brian McLaren visit in August as evangelical input into the life of our Church.

We continue to meet as an executive for prayer and for mutual support in Christchurch, on a bimonthly basis: if ever you are in Christchurch unexpectedly, give Alan a call and if the seasons are in tune, we'll give you a good home-cooked meal and you can enjoy worship with us.

The main focus for the Network this year has been the research and the preparation of a paper calling te Haahi Weteriana to re-visit its roots as a church that challenged society both with its call to personal holiness and engagement with the issues of society: a whole gospel for people passionate about the difference that faith in Christ makes. Our calling as a network is to keep this focus before the church as a whole, not just those who self-identify as evangelicals: and we are delighted to hear that these same initiatives and energies are coming from other parts of the church as well.

That paper is reproduced below.

And the other major piece of work engaging us has been the preparation and trial of a booklet for the hands of every Methodist, to encourage them to share their faith: a booklet that is not prescriptive but invitational, not specifically evangelical but enabling all Methodists to take pride in talking about the gospel in ways that are relevant and contextual in every community in which te Haahi Weteriana is represented. Again, we hope that that will be in a more advanced state if not actually ready for distribution at Conference.

PAPER ONE:

Discussion Paper from Rev Alan K Webster

an Evangelical Network contribution to Te Haahi Weteriana vision-casting for 2016

Okay...so there's a problem...or a series of problems if we're honest. The first is that we have older and colder congregations...

This isn't a problem in itself: I know of several congregations who have with varying degrees of success, embraced the fact that they are not ever going to be singing choruses, playing guitars and drums...and well, you get the idea.

However, the raw facts are that if we keep on the way we are, a higher and higher proportion of our congregations will be in care or unable to make their way to worship under their own steam...or will be dead.

What is more worrying to me than the aging of the congregation itself is the decreasing energy there is available for doing things that make a difference: whether that be running a church fair, engaging in discussions about the future or considering an even more basic question: *what is church for?* The energy levels required for such decisions need youthfulness...and as congregations get older that youthfulness gets harder to harder to find.

The obvious corollary is that what could be (*should be*) a vital institution ever-changing to meet the context of a new community becomes more and more stable, more and more conservative (in terms of conserving history) and more and more out of touch with where modern culture actually is. This was demonstrated to me vividly a little while ago in a small rural parish where I was informed that we would be singing modern choruses before the service...and we were launched happily into Scripture in Song, copyright 1972. 1972 was a great year: but it was, elemental mathematics will tell you, 44 years ago. It was modern 43 years ago...it surely isn't now. You will not be surprised to hear that the music was chosen by a lady in her eighties...played by a lady in her nineties...by no means the oldest in the service, and I at a ripe old 60 was the youngest present.

Music is just one touch point. It's an obvious one: you can instantly tell the culture of any congregation by its worship music (not necessarily its age, but the way it's played...) but I could make educated guesses as to the number of community events run by that congregation, the number of new families who stayed, the trend of the offerings and the visibility of that church in the community: and so could you.

Okay...this is not a new observation: and you'll have heard several diagnostics.

As I see it, we have several options.

OPTION ONE: despair, wring our hands, talk about it a lot but do nothing and change nothing. That's the default position, and it's what I fear most of us will do.

OPTION TWO: We could tweak around the edges a bit...berate those faithful souls who have kept it all running and make them feel guilty perhaps, or bring in outside experts with stories of transformation to ginger the troops for another effort. Actually, I'm not quite that cynical...that's important, and the charge that someone made that a fanatic is one who redoubles his energy when they have lost their sense of direction is an important warning! Mid-course corrections are necessary: and I have been in a situation where we tried a radical change in worship style to attract new people: energised a few, alienated many, and attracted none. However, there is at least one other option.

OPTION THREE

To offer this option for NZ Methodism, I have some observations to make

1. Older, established congregations usually do not have the energy for new ideas. Yeah, I know this is a generalization and there are some lovely exceptions, but by and large, when you get older you are more interested in maintaining what you know is comfortable than in trying anything new
2. For any new enterprise to take off, or indeed to even find expression, some kind of a leader is needed. Think Steve Jobs, Stephen Tindall, John Wesley, Smith Wigglesworth...doesn't matter who, all new things begin with a person and a vision. Currently NZ Methodism does not have leadership with experience in beginning new churches...at least, palangi Methodism doesn't. Again, I see glimpses of it in some of my colleagues: but the generalization holds true. Even if you give me names, I will still respond "Yes, but..."
3. We do have plenty of possible places where new communities of grace might begin. Think Halswell in Christchurch, Albany in Auckland...any new suburban development, or indeed any place where a church has died of old age despite being surrounded by new housing.
4. Note that if people have the energy to relocate to a new suburb, even if they are somewhat greyer of hair than you and I they obviously have some get up and go: church plants in retirement villages are by no means a waste of time.
5. We do not have resources for buildings, even if building were necessary. In olden days, if you wanted to build a congregation, very early in the piece you built a building...in the wake of Christchurch's earthquakes and the subsequent insurance inflation that has taken place, more and more churches are becoming uneconomic and more and more people are taking a longer and harder look at whether a church needs a fulltime, full-sized worship centre.
6. The Wesleyans have just planted a church in Christchurch...they did so with the expertise of a trained church planter who had received specialist training in this area, and Clint Ussher has in a very short time gathered a congregation of about eighty young adults who worship in a local primary school hall, who are making a significant impact in the local community and have rented office space in a high visibility prime location (corner Colombo and Brougham Streets) announcing the new Methodist Church in Christchurch. In my opinion, their congregation looks little different from many independent Pentecostal church plants in the city, and it is certainly true that some of their congregation come from other Christian communities nearby: but they are Being Church in an authentic way that is probably currently unmatched by te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa.
7. The question has to be asked: should it be our aim simply to have another service or services churches replicating what is being done better elsewhere? Does Christchurch, or any other community for that matter, really need another independent Pentecostal church, singing modern songs to a set bandpiece (guitar, bass, drum and electronic keyboard, two female singers leading and the Standard Pentecostal Order of Service? (excuse my cynicism...but just wait until you hear my description of a typical Methodist Church service, below). I don't think so...nor, for the record, do I ever want to discourage such efforts on the behalf of other denominations. All the best, mate: you will do what you will do and if it comes with the grace of God, all strength to your arm...

8. However: if we believe that te Haahi has something worthwhile, something passionate, something unique, something uniquely ours to add to the mix of offerings to our community, we should be offering it with confidence and with pride. Mere duplication is daft: but methodical ministry isn't (!)
9. I believe that there are three things te Haahi Weteriana has that others don't: that entitle us, that call us, that justify and validate us offering new congregations and places of worship.

These are:

- (a) We have deliberately and intentionally shared power with New Zealand's treaty partner, and all our decision-making reflects our intention to keep doing that. Other churches pay lip service to Maoritanga: te Haahi Weteriana chooses to share power in a way that demonstrates what this means. We are so used to that that we fail to celebrate it, to be proud of it...and it is, in my opinion, a mark of Christlikeness that is attractive, that is either remarkable for those who have thought much about it or unremarkable to those who haven't: but either way, it's part of the warp and weft of who we are that entitles us to say " We have something to offer" in a context where these questions are being wrestled with in government, in education, in day to day living.
 - (b) We have come to terms with the questions of gay inclusion in our church. This has been hard-fought, hard-won: other denominations are just beginning to tear themselves to pieces over issues that we have dealt with, and that largely represent a view shared by modern society. My personal opinion is that the battle has been a mystery to most of the people we seek to minister Jesus' love and grace to: why on earth would anyone question that leadership comes from people who are leaders, regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, hair style or anything else? It's axiomatic in world politics, in business, and now in law: and NZ Methodists are almost unique in having moved past it. That is to celebrate and be proud of.
 - (c) We are a broad denomination, with a diversity of theological understandings, a diversity of cultures, and diversity of personalities, and we have intentionally chosen to empower minority and to control loud majority voices in our consensus decision-making operations. I cringe when I hear some of my colleagues bemoaning the inevitable inefficiencies of processes and the apparent inertia of te Haahi Weteriana in making decisions: it is true that decisive leadership is able to work nimbly and to respond quickly in situations where that is needed, but in my experience a wholly inappropriate Messiah complex rapidly attends those who use such decisiveness, regardless of what such a leader is called, regardless of whether he has appointed himself bishop or someone else has, regardless of whether the position is hereditary or fenced with checks and balances. I believe that the flat leadership structure of our denomination to be appealing to a world that shares stories of a CEO taking a pay cut to enable his employees to have a living wage, a story of a workplace where the boss is indistinguishable from the humblest employee, stories of Kiwi soldiers saluting with a casual wave and of greeting the Prime Minister by first name in a pub. That culture appeals to our culture: makes sense, fits in with a context and a culture that is relevant to twentieth century New Zealand...
10. These three distinctives, te Haahi Weteriana distinctives, appeal to our communities: to our younger communities, to a post-modern world: and I would also argue, represent an earthing of theology into Kiwi culture that we can be proud of. We are not strange bridges to nowhere across rivers that have moved (see below): we are at least beginning in a place where, like Paul addressing the Athenians, we can speak the language and use the imagery of our culture.

Figure 1: A bridge, in perfect condition: minus its approaches so it's impossible to get onto, and no longer doing what bridges are supposed to do: because the river has moved. (Thanks to Darryl Tempero for the image :-)



Aaah: but do we?

We have the strange idea that if we keep doing what we have always done, that somehow there will be a mass migration into our formal meetings of highly structured rites, using ancient hymnody and practices. It's hugely discomfoting in many of our churches to ask whether those people our congregations shop alongside, attend rugby or concerts alongside, go to Rotary or tennis or bowls with, could ever sit, let alone fit, in anything that is currently going on during Sunday morning gatherings. Don't hear me calling us to stop doing that: there is a value in looking after people, and we can't and shouldn't simply turn our backs on the loyal people who want to conserve music, styles, friendships and experiences that they value. Just don't tell me that it is going to attract new people, the culture in which we live, that it is in any way mission. It isn't, and it will never be.

11. Now: some clarification is urgently required. TV 3 dumped *Campbell Live* because the show was deemed less commercially attractive to advertisers than a cooking programme. Somewhere in here we need recognition that if what we do is solely driven by marketing forces, we will end up compromising core values, basic identities, what the gospel is really all about: it would certainly be possible to have services/Sunday events that bore no relation to anything worthwhile. At a ridiculous extreme, offering free beer and lotto tickets every Sunday would probably attract a clientele...we obviously need to be clear what is important and what is peripheral, what is essential to our faith and what is style, culture, individual preference and therefore dispensable.
12. I have outlined above what I believe te Haahi's distinctives are: but we are far more than what makes us different. Our distinctives give us the right to speak in a crowded marketplace: but our reason for existing is not simply to gather like-minded New Zealanders into meeting places. Our reason for existence is the preaching of the gospel: and if necessary, using words (Francis of Assisi...) Our reason for existence is spiritual: engaging our communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and engaging in spiritual conversations both with our words and our deeds.
13. If we are not doing this, we face extinction. If we do not bring people into faith we are doomed as a denomination. If we do not create communities of faith that engage with the gospel, in word and in deed, our lifespan will be a generation or two at best. Those places where the church is doing this are the places of life and of hope: and they need all the encouragement and resourcing that they can get.
14. However, I believe that we need to be more proactive than to simply pin our hopes on places that still nurture the flame of evangelism – of telling and living the gospel, the good news of Jesus. Note: I do not say “evangelical” I say “flame of evangelism”...and by that I mean all those communities where there is passion and fire in the belly and energy and vision, not necessarily those of any particular theology. It's a challenge to the whole breadth of te Haahi Weteriana..
15. We need some new leaders: presbyters and church leaders: people who have the vision of engaging their communities with the gospel. We need people to plant gospel-telling and gospel-doing groups into communities, to begin new Methodist churches that will take our distinctives and the gospel of Jesus with creative energy and passion into a world that has changed. Whatever the needs of a new generation of committed Methodists are or are likely to be, they don't seem to be coming out of the present rank and files of current presbyters. I am certainly wrong in detail: I know and value creative individuals with creative energy, but they do not seem to be successfully creating new self-sustaining communities of faith.

THE PROPOSITION

16. **I propose** finding, training, equipping and resourcing a team of individuals to be charged with the task of planting new congregations in each and every synod, in new suburbs all over New Zealand, using a pattern of church planting and beginning new churches after the Fresh Expressions models from the United Kingdom.
17. **I propose** calling for expressions of interest from our existing Trinity students and from overseas, after a model of Home Missioners from the past: overseen by our College and a group charged with pastoral care and supervision of this team.
18. Such a team would be given a timeframe of not less than seven years to accomplish their tasks, and be supervised and supported financially along the way towards planting of congregations, not building new buildings: in finding new and creative ways of engaging with

their communities, and of inspiring and encouraging their neighbouring congregations to help with whatever resources might be needed.

19. A worker-priest model where these church planting team members were expected to be employed part-time in their communities would have huge advantages: intentional embedding in high visibility employment seems relevant, important.
20. Specialist Training is available in New Zealand: Fresh Expressions (a UK Methodist/Anglican approach to finding new expressions of Church) have resources here in New Zealand: trainers would probably be available for extra modules at Trinity for interested students (see 17 above) or for potential leaders yet to be identified from the church.

Suggested decisions:

1. That the report be received.
2. That Conference approves in principle this vision of a national team of Methodist and Union Parish church planters for a new millennium.
3. That Conference charges the Evangelical Network, in consultation with Mission Resourcing and Trinity College, with the task of assembling a team from te Taha Maori, regional synods, Vahefonua, Sinoti and Wasewase to facilitate this vision, for reporting back to Conference 2016.

NEW ZEALAND METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

“We Are God’s Reach Out”



President’s Report

In the Almighty name of our Creator God, the foundation of this organisation, I would like to say Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Bula Vinaka, Morena, Tena Koutou Katoa, Greetings and a warm Good Morning to each and everyone here today.

With the guidance of our Awesome God, and the perseverance, commitment and prayerful support of our NZMWF family we have made it to the end of another year. It has been a great year of learning new experiences, new skills and meeting more grass root members in our Districts. However it has its challenges but it is very reassuring to know that God is with us.

The Lord is my strength and my shield my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped’ (Psalm 28:7)

Praise be to the Lord!

Tributes

We remember with gratitude and with love those who have died during the past year and we record a special tribute to those who served with dignity on a National Executive:

Jean Margaret Rickard (Wellington District),
Pearl Hart (Wellington District),
Alice Lorna Climo (Manukau District)
Edith Sealey (Waikato /Thames Valley District).

We give thanks to God for their great contributions and service to NZMWF mission. We also extend our heartfelt sympathy to families, friends and their fellowship families within our Methodist family.

National Council 2015

This year NZMWF National Council was held in Hastings, officially the most beautiful city in New Zealand, in September. It was a privilege to have the Vice President of the Methodist Church of New Zealand Dr Arapera Ngaha who gave the reflection at the official opening of the National Council. It was honour too to have the His worship the Mayor Bill Dalton and Mayoress of Napier at our service.

39 women attend National Council.

Leu Pupulu, Treasurer of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and our Helen Kim Scholar Lise Wikitera were also present during Council. Members of Council were privileged to be entertained by Leu's stories of her experiences during her travels around the world, but behind all that there was a serious and challenging message that members of Council picked up and responded with love and support. Council unanimously agreed to donate US\$1000.00 to WFMUCW to assist some of our sister Units in the South Pacific Area to continue their affiliation membership with the WFMUCW. We acknowledged and thanked our members on the World Federation Office for their contribution and commitment to our World Federation mission. We offer our prayerful support and God's blessings as they prepare and organise the World Assembly in 2016.

Next year in August/September will be the World Assembly, held the same time as the World Methodist Church Conference in Houston, Texas. The NZMWF Unit is nominating Mrs Itamua Mataiva Robertson to the election of the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women's Secretary role. We thank Itamua Mataiva for allowing her name to be nominated for this post. We wish our sister Itamua Mataiva our prayerful support and God's blessings

NZMWF Unit is also nominating one of Ruta Faafuata for the Helen Kim Scholarship selection in 2016. This will not stop other young women from our wider Methodist family to apply if they wish to apply as long as they meet the criteria.

President Elect for 2016 – 2018

It is my pleasure to announce the President Elect of the NZMWF for 2016 - 2018, she is Mrs Dianne Cloughton from the North Canterbury District. Congratulations and our prayers for Dianne as she plans and put together her executive committee

Presidential Visits

During the last 12 months, with the company of some of the National Executive Committee I have visited some of our Districts. I visited the Mafutagata Tamaitai Sinoti Samoa District in April. The theme of their biannual gathering is "Women and the Gospel". This was promoted and reinforced through Bible study, inspirational workshops and an evening of biblical plays and gospel singing.

The highlight of this weekend was the increase in numbers of our young women who attended and participated at the programme from the six regions of Sinoti Samoa. Another highlight was the presence of the President and leaders of the Tongan Women Fellowship District as special guests to fellowship, share their stories, cultures and witness God's beauty through Methodist Women's Fellowship. It was a night of laughter, fun and sharing a palagi style dinner and spiritual supper.

Before our visit to the tri-districts rally of the Waitemata, Manukau and Auckland Districts, there was a bit of uncertainty if there would be any members turning up at the rally and how true it is as the bible says that "Our thoughts are not His thoughts". It was a beautiful day, and a good turnout of members from the three districts including some men/husbands who are our great supporters, drivers and body guards. Following the set programme and a shared lunch, there was entertainment by the Pearl Choir managed by Barbara Olds, it was fantastic. It was a special honour to visit some of the members who haven't been participating at their local/district gatherings due to ill health and aging but the spirit is very much committed to the mission of MWF

After attending the Feohi'anga'a Fafine Metotisi Tonga I Niu Sila annual general meeting, in Auckland, with the company of our two members of our national executive, we attended the Wellington Fellowship District at their AGM in Lower Hutt. It was a pleasure to meet the Coordinator of the PWANZ who joined in after lunch and it was a great time of sharing and encouraging each other, leaders and all members. The highlights of these visits is meeting our members and listening to their stories, sharing their experiences and ideas as they are the pioneers who worked hard to bring the MWF to where it is now. It is a great opportunity to share the work of the NZMWF to date, to acknowledge in appreciation their contributions and commitment to the mission of MWF and pray with them. It is a real honour to visit the ladies who are unable to attend the districts activities.

We are recognising the decrease in numbers and limited availability of fellowship members in

fulfilling the leadership positions due to aging and ill health, which is inhibiting the operation of some Districts. Please be reminded that in the NZMWF Constitution on clause 1.1.4 it says *The Constitution of NZMWF enables each MWF {hereafter called "District"} of NZMWF to have Flexibility to operate its own affairs within the context of the Methodist law as prescribed by the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa and this Constitution.* I hope this will give a heads up to some of our Districts who are unsure of a way forward due to decreased membership.

I strongly believe that NZMWF is very much alive because it is founded on the Living God who is Alive! Reading through the reports and minutes from different Districts of NZMWF, I am amazed and very grateful with the commitment, the perseverance and the spiritual strength that is shown through the reports all because of their faith in God despite age and ill health.

Special Projects

Our theme this year reminds us that "We are God's Hands Reach Out" and make God Known to the world. NZMWF continue to do that through Special Projects and many other ways. It is so uplifting and encouraging to read the District reports and minutes on how these funds have been raised. So many creative ideas and activities that our fellowships are doing to raise money for Special Projects, so thank you so much. This year we have raised \$29,145.79

Special Project theme "Together We Can" is supporting the Neythal Group programme in South India to help fisher folk improve their livelihood and campaign for the rights of women and children.

Diabetes in children and youth in New Zealand is truly an epidemic and it is affecting a lot of young people especially from lower socio economics populations the programme Diabetes Youth NZ is a great support for those young people and their families.

Special Project Theme for 2015 – 2016 "Empower to Rebuild"

Special Projects are selected in conjunction with the representatives from NZMWF & PWANZ and a representative from CWS.

The two new Special Projects are:

International

"The Philippines post "Typhoon Haiyen ". The focus is to empower the people of the Phillipines to rebuild their livelihood that had been destroyed by the Typhoon Haiyen.

National

"The Young New Zealanders Foundation" for printing the "Gemstone 2" to help the teachers/educators who work with the most vulnerable young people in Year 7 & 8.

I would like to acknowledge the great efforts of all our members of NZMWF and Parishes in their tireless work in reaching out to make a difference in other people's lives.

Thank you! Faafetai lava! Malo aupito! and Vinaka vaka levu , Glory be to God!

Other Funds

Stamp fund: money raised = \$1,303.20

Medical & Education fund: money raised = \$1,908.00

Total of two funds above = \$3,211.20

NZMWF has approved that this money be donated to the Tabaka Solar Power Funds in the Solomon Islands.

Grants and Scholarships

Letters of appreciation and gratitude have been received from some of the past recipients of the Smethurst, Kurahuna and Friendship grants to let the members of MWF know what a difference these grants have made to their education and their lives. It is good to know that these grants are serving their purposes.

Grants distributed with in this financial year:

Smethurst	\$15,200.00
Friendship	\$5,150.00
Kurahuna	\$7,892.29

All information on these grants applications can be found on the MCNZ website under Methodist Womens Fellowship.

Financial Reporting Changes

Any new changes is always not so easy to accept and to implement especially with new girls in the ring but anything is possible with God and I am very proud to say that NZMWF is now on the new format Tier 3 as required by Charities Service and reinforced by MCNZ .

NZMWF will be using the Xero programme for its financial recordings.

WIDER INVOLVEMENT

Pacific Women Watch

NZMWF is a member of the Pacific Women's Watch which is based in Auckland. We acknowledge the commitment and participation of our representatives on the PWW. A special thank you to Vaotane Samoa Saleupolu who has resigned due to family relocation. We welcome. Leu Pupulu as our new representative with Fumi Schaaf.

National Council of Women

Our members are very involved with this organisation in our local and national level. It is a great opportunity for our members and NZMWF to be involved and have a voice on a lot of social issues that involves our families, community and women. NCW annual conference will be held on the 26th of September that will held in Wellington and Fia Young our NCW link will be attending.

Congratulations and blessings to Alison Kane from Nelson who received a distinguished award from the National Council of Women for her service and commitment to NCW

Thank you for being God's Hands in this World in so many different ways, and may His Grace continue to equip, empower and enable us all so we can continue to reach out to people in need of Gods healing Grace.

Suggested decision:

1. That this report be received.