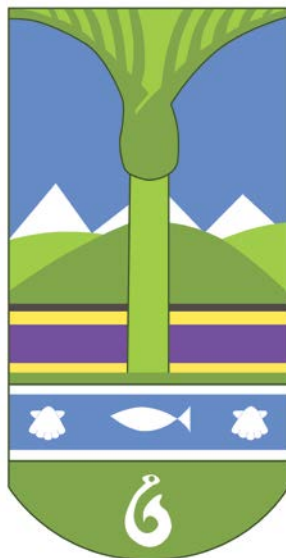


Methodist Conference 2015

Te Háhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

- A time to re-sow, a time to re-grow -



The Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand met in Blenheim at the Marlborough Convention Centre from Saturday 14 November until Wednesday 18 November 2015

The intention of this record is to provide Conference delegates with summary material to report back to their congregations. This needs to be read in conjunction with the Conference sheets, where full lists of people involved, roles, and appointments will be found. That material and the formal record of decisions and minutes taken by Conference secretaries takes precedence over these more informal notes, for historical and legal purposes!

Full proceedings and formal records of conference decisions are available on the Methodist website, <http://www.methodist.org.nz/conference/2015>

Overseas guests of Conference included:

Rev Dr Finau Ahio, President Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
Rev Apineru Lafai, President, Methodist Church of Samoa
Rev Faulalo Leti, General Secretary, Methodist Church of Samoa
Rev Tevita Banivanua, President, Methodist Church of Fiji
Rev Dr Apwee Ting, National Director, Multi/Cross Cultural Ministry, Uniting Church of Australia
Rev Colleen Geyer, Incoming General Secretary, Uniting Church of Australia

Observers from Other New Zealand Churches:

Rev Johanna Warren, Alpine Presbytery, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

SATURDAY

Methodist Conference began on a somewhat chilly spring morning at the Blenheim Convention Centre with a spirited Karanga from the Tangata Whenua calling us into the formal Powhiri. We received a warm welcome from our hosts, the people of Nelson – Malborough - West Coast Synod. The manuhiri extended their thanks for the welcome.

The Powhiri was followed by the opening service and the acknowledgement of those who had died throughout the year. We were reminded of our heritage and the lives of the people who had served in Te Haahi. The occasion was enriched by the young Horn player, Jonty Zydenbos, who played before and after the service. Lunch was a time for people to catch up and start to exchange news.

The opening of the service honouring those who had retired was saddened by the news of the terrorist attacks in Paris with the great loss of life. President Tovia led us in prayer for the victims and their families, reminding us of the Apostle Paul's statement that when one member of the body is hurt, the whole body feels the pain.

During the service David McGeorge conducted interviews with the retiring presbyters; Rob Ferguson, Kepu Moa, John Murray, Val Nicholls and Aso Samoa Saleupolo. Anne Griffiths was unable to attend but had also been interviewed. The answers to David's questions – What brought you to ministry? What were your significant achievements or moments? What would you change in the church? – spurred some appreciative response from the congregation. It was also an emotional moment when Conference stood to honour Aso's contribution to the life of Te Haahi.

We enjoyed a magnificent Conference dinner at the Convention Centre, MC'd by Michael Lemanu and entertained by David Hotere on guitar, followed by Ieremia Amituana'i on keyboard and Opeta and Filisha as vocalists. Sir Ray Avery was our inspirational speaker. He kept us entertained and challenged with his life story, his hopes and dreams for making the world a better place and how Kiwis are well-equipped to do just that. Sir Ray thinks Kiwis have little respect for rules, know that anybody can do anything, and that we dare to dream. "The power of *us*" acknowledges that people working together can achieve what individuals alone cannot: a message for Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa.

SUNDAY

Sunday is one of the more ceremonial and celebratory days of Conference before the members get down to listening to reports and debating in earnest. The day began at the Wesley Centre with a short time of worship with the Connexional theme of Let the Children Live, which was led by Rev Rex Nathan and Rev Setaita Kinahoi-Veikune, with Rex focussing on suicide and seeking to replace the cycles of destroying life with those which affirm life. Several younger people led our prayers and readings.

Members of Conference then broke up into the Te Taha Maori and Tauwiwi caucuses, to discuss specific concerns and ideas. These meetings prepare what each partner wishes to report to the other when Conference proper begins on Monday. Since both caucuses are formed with people who have very strong and varied opinions these occasions can get somewhat fraught at times.

At their conclusion was lunch, with a special lunch for Lay Preachers at which they held their annual meeting.

After lunch the focus of Conference was switched to the Blenheim Conference Centre, which is the venue for the more business side of Conference. On this occasion it was the main service of the day - the Ordination service. Every year the service generates energy and excitement, especially from the families, friends and parishes of those being ordained. This year Falanisesi Fusitu'a Hafoka was ordained a deacon, and Akinihi Keita Hotere, Alivereti Uludole, Finau Halaleva, Hosea Tupou, Ieremia Amani Amituana'i, Joeli Ducivaki, Melema'u Molitika, Moimoi 'Ahu Kaufononga were ordained presbyters. In the service there were choral contributions from the Wesley Centre

Choir, the Hastings Samoan Choir, the Wasewase Ko Viti Choir and the Blenheim Tongan Choir, with further music provided by Jonty and Hannah Zydenbos on trumpet and piano. Rev Trevor Hoggard was the preacher; he reminded us all that, following John Wesley, what we believe is less important than having a heart right with God, and the need to receive from God a Spirit of Discernment when exercising ministry.

At the conclusion of the Ordination service, we returned to the Wesley Centre for afternoon tea and the end of formal business for the day.

However there were two evening meetings with food, both taking place at the same venue, but beginning an hour apart. The first was the Liberal Society / Evangelical Network Meeting/Dinner and the second was the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Network and Friends Dinner. Maybe the really hungry went to both!

MONDAY

The Conference Candle was lit

President Tovia Aumua and acting Vice President Jan Tasker were introduced (Vice President Arapera (Bella) Ngaha absent to be with sick husband).

Opening worship was presented by Rev Val Nichols and Trinity College representatives.

The business of Conference started with an introduction to Conference staff, observers, official guests and the Council of Elders. The rules for decision making and Conference Process were explained.

The stationing sheet listing appointments for the coming year was received and adopted. This is always an important part of the life of Conference.

A short presentation was heard from a representative from the Christian Supply Chain (Craig Johnson). They offer bulk buying for the benefit of the member churches. Details are on the Methodist website.

Conference then separated into Te Taha Maori and Tauwiwi Caucuses both of which gave priority to the Caucus views on election of the next President and Vice President.

Tauwiwi discussed Trans Cultural issues which concern the place of Pacifica congregations and English speaking congregations the proposal that congregations which worship in Tongan, Samoan and Fijian could choose to be responsible to Vahefonau, Sinoti and Wasewase. No consensus was reached therefore the current law stands meaning congregations worshipping in a Pacific language must be accountable to their respective synod.

After morning tea the Business committees met to discuss the committee reports in greater depth and share input about future directions.

Following lunch, President Tovia drew attention to the recent bombing in France and the resulting reprisals. Tumuaki Diana Tana led us in prayer for the victims and invited us to pray also for the Maori King.

Partnership reporting included feedback from Council of Conference, Te Taha Maori and Tauwiwi.

Council of Conference

Susan Thompson acknowledged the long faithful service of the late Lana Lazarus. The issue of a trial period for two year conferences was discussed and after significant discussion deferred until later in Conference.

PAC Distribution. David Bush reminded us we should treat the PAC Fund as a partnership for significant key projects to which we are also contributing, not a means to fully fund a project.

TeTaha Maori Report

Te Taha Maori are renewing their Enabling Ministry Team and are developing a new model of working with Ranatahi (Youth). They also reaffirmed the vision of Let the Children Live.

Board Of Administration

The Robert Gibson Trust Chair Bill Yateman gave an update of Board Activities. (The Trust is a farm property that gives annual grants to students e.g. Wesley College student, youth ministry and tertiary students). This year a new milking shed has been built and riparian planting of streams and waterways is almost complete.

Methodist Trust Association Executive Officer Greg Wright pointed out that while MTA returns continue to be strong reduced interest rates may affect future returns.

Greg Wright is retiring at the end of 2016. The Board of Administration and MTA Board are engaged in a process to make a new appointment by Conference 2016.

Stipends

Although stipends were recommended as adjusted upwards by 0.8% (slightly less than the measured increase for our partner churches), this is balanced by the fact that Methodist allowances are slightly higher than those for our partner Churches.

The changes to tax deductibility rules mean that parishes or presbyters no longer have a tax deduction allowance for parsonage study use and instead will be given an additional \$30/month to cover such use.

The Church will be providing a booklet to clarify what is required by way of employment contracts, minimum wages, health and safety legislation, Holidays act etc for those employed on wages and salaries.

Supernumerary Fund

The Supernumerary Fund must comply with Financial Markets Authority regulations by 1st December 2016. Conference agreed to changes of the Trust Deed and a new company to administer the fund to ensure that the fund meets the requirements of the FMA.

Connexional Trusts

Greg explained the history of the PACT 2086 Trust. One novel development a small part of the **PACT 2086 Trust** is a 2% investment in a Greenfields type development including an investment into CarbonScape Limited which aims to convert wood waste (e.g. *Pinus Radiata*) using microwaves, into charcoal for the steel industry.

The other significant Trust development in conjunction with Wesley College Board is the further development of **Grafton Downs Limited** in Paerata in which the two surrounding farms and campus of Wesley College are being developed with an initial development of 1000 sections in accordance with the joint Special Housing Accord between the Government and the Auckland City Council. It is hoped that future proceeds from this project will help safeguard the future income of the wider Methodist Church and provide a secure future for Wesley College.

The Methodist Connexional Property Committee

The Methodist Connexional Property Committee reported on insurance arrangements. Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans are working together to obtain competitive insurance for the church. Details of cover available and on maintaining adequate levels of insurance can be found in the Insurance Handbook (Information Booklet No. 81 on the Methodist Website).

A review of the aftermath of the Canterbury Earthquake damage and claims had been undertaken by Mr Roger Fulford of GT Risk Management who concluded the Church had negotiated a favourable claims settlement in relation to the damage sustained by its property.

The report to Conference on seismic strengthening requirements has been delayed as the Government Select Committee is still to report and can be found in the agenda papers: see the

Methodist website. A summary of the initial Select Committee recommendations is listed in the report. Conference accepted this report.

The report on **Trinity College** was presented by the Principal the Rev Nasili Vaka'uta. The College has appointed new staff. Rev Dr Mary Caygill and Dr Emily Colgan. It has also developed a new programme and will offer face to face courses and some papers via live streaming. Their full report is in agenda Section E and is worth reading.

After the evening meal, conference reconvened for the Korean Churches' presentation. Korean Ministers from Auckland and Christchurch were present and a video greeting from the Bishop in Korea was shared.

Unfortunately the intended **Bioethics Road Show** entitled "Forged" was not staged and will be held over until the next conference at Wesley College. This is the same show which is designed principally for secondary school students to gain an initial exposure to bioethics issues facing modern communities.

Tauivi Report on Sexuality

Tauivi Report on Sexuality was presented. It was a time of careful sharing and listening as Tauivi reported on the very positive work of a Task Group who had been seeking to respond to the question "Would Tauivi accept a gay or lesbian President". The work group will in 2016 be available for parishes, synods and boards to facilitate conversations.

The Evangelical Network report invited the Conference to consider planting new groups to cater to new people. After conversation this was referred to Mission Resourcing for further consideration and development of the proposal.

The Day concluded with by devotions led by Blenheim Methodist Congregation. The words of the Beatles song 'Help' made for an interested prayer of intercession.

Please note: All Conference agenda papers are on the Methodist website www.methodist.org.nz.

TUESDAY

We started the day with a very inspiring devotion by Wasewase ko Viti Kei Rotuma with the emphasis on "LIFE – EVERYTHING starts with the Grace of God".

Mission Resourcing

Some of the items in the report were: Refresh, Korean Dialogue, Dialogue with the Reformed Church of Tuvalu, Chaplaincy forum 2015, Candidates, Co-operative Ventures Orientation Day and Police Vetting, with presentations on Lay Ministry Support and Tauivi Children, Young People and Families Ministries.

A few remarks on the discussions:

- The Tauivi Children, Young People and Families Ministries work has been focussed around connecting *our young people* to Parish life and each-other, resourcing, and *inspiring our young people to get involved in theological and spirituality conversations?*
- *Mission Resourcing offer to come to parishes or synods to give support and instruction on any topic requested.*
- Conference expresses its gratitude to the Rev Aso Saleupolu for the sensitive, dedicated and sacrificial ministry he has offered the Church during his years of ministry at Mission Resourcing and elsewhere in the connexion.
- *Two websites that can be very helpful for youth ministry and worship were mentioned during the presentations:*
 - *Sustainable Practices for Youth ministry* – www.sustainablepractices.org.nz
 - *Worship resources* – www.trevorhoggard.com

Methodist Mission Aotearoa / Social Services

Some of the items discussed were: housing, 'Let the Children Live' programme, the Employment Generation Fund, Ministry With The Deaf Trust, financial report, Methodist City Action, Social Justice, Sinoti Samoa Methodist Mission highlights, strategies, challenge and looking forward, Wesley Community Action, Palmerston North Methodist Social Services, Christchurch Methodist Mission and Methodist Mission Southern.

A few remarks on the discussions:

- Lifewise's work that needs special mentioning: Early Childhood Education, support for families going through legal separation, children in care and several projects underway to support decision making on the future of our work in community based older and disability care.
- Conference heard a presentation and received a draft document ('PARTS OF A WHOLE') in relation to moving towards an Alliance of Methodist Missions, Parish and Community based Social Services.
- VAHEFONUVA TONGA METHODIST MISSION CHARITABLE TRUST's work that needs special mentioning: 2015 Education and Training Expo, Improving Early Childcare Education Participation and Suicide Prevention Program.

Mission and Ecumenical

Mission & Ecumenical's mission is for people to have life and have it abundantly. The work can be summarized in two words, Koinonia (fellowship) and Diakonia (service) and the report were presented under these two headings with the ecumenical engagements (National and International) clearly visible. The strategic plan for 2016-2018 were also given.

Ruth Fa'afuata and Tumema Faioso reported on their attendance of the "**Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity**" annual programme which was held in Siam Reap, Cambodia.

The president congratulated Rev. Diana Tana who was elected as Vice-Moderator of **Christian Conference of Asia**

Conference received a report from **Christian World Services** who celebrated their 70th anniversary. Conference encourages parishes to contribute to the CWS Christmas Appeal.

Social Issues (Public Issues Network) focussed a lot on CHURCH NETWORKS, Migrants and Refugees, The Living Wage, Just Transitions, Trans Pacific Partnership, Inequality, Climate / Low Carbon, Freshwater, Principle of Responsibility and Let Children Live Activities with extended report on Green Church Aotearoa.

Colleen Geyer General Secretary of the Uniting Church of Australia gave a presentation on Environmental Sustainability challenging the Church to think how small changes can make a difference.

The **Inter-Church Bioethics Council (ICBC)**, an ecumenical cross-cultural body supported by the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand gave their report.

Faith and Order reported on matters like Methodist-Anglican Dialogue, Methodist-Catholic Dialogue and current global Theological discussions.

A few remarks on the discussions:

- The latest edition of the Lectionary includes a COCU references. This helps people preparing Worship, access resources more easily.
- One fruit of the ecumenical relations in New Zealand is the publication of a common baptismal certificate which is available from the connexional office.
- Mindful of our ecumenical dialogues and to further our own self-understanding as a church, Conference encourages the Church to reflect upon how episcopacy is expressed in the life of Conference and in the function of the Presidential team.

Overseas Guests

We received greetings from:

Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga - Rev Dr. Finau 'Ahiio

Methodist Church in Fiji - Rev Tevita Banivanua

Uniting Church of Australia - Rev Dr Apwee Ting and Colleen Geyer

Presbyterian Church (Alpine Presbytery) - Rev Johanna Warren

Under the **Communications** report we mainly discussed Methodist Publishing Board (Touchstone) and Media & Communications Endowment Fund.

A few remarks on the discussions:

- The Methodist Website (www.methodist.org.nz) needs special mentioning for a great upgrade: In July the website was re-engineered so that it is functional on smart phones and tablets, as well as larger screens. The new menus and layout have also enhanced the website.
- Two Touchstone journalists received awards from the Australasian Religious Press Assoc.:
 - Silver Medal for best news story – Sophie Parish
 - Bronze award for best column – Gillian Watkin

Close of Day

Like a mother tucking her child in and telling a story at the end of the day, the Methodist Women's Fellowship led us during a most comforting devotion about God's LOVE and our love for each other and the world we live in (including a story).

WEDNESDAY

The morning began with a lively, participatory opening worship, led by the youth from Vahefonua Tonga.

The work of Law Revision was received, and amendments to Section 2, 6, and 7 of the Laws & Regulations, were approved.

Then it was on with "Unfinished business", as is usual on the final day of Conference.

Methodist Women's Fellowship gave a colourful snapshot of their year's work. MWF is to be commended for including younger women on the National Executive, to ensure leadership experience and succession. MWF raises significant funds for mission projects, including \$29,145.79 for the 2014-15 Special Projects, \$3,211.20 for the Tabaka solar power units.

A significant decision affecting the life of our church was reached. The Council of Conference recommendation that after 2016, Conferences be held two yearly on an experimental basis (in 2018 and 2020) was agreed by Conference, as step 1 of a two year decision-making process. Council of Conference and Law Revision have each been asked to do some further work for discussion in the church during 2016, with a report and final decision to be made at the 2016 Conference.

Conference also returned to further consideration of the report from the Tauwi Task Group on Sexuality, which noted that Tauwi is not yet able to reach a consensus on whether they will accept a gay or lesbian person as President. Conference heard Te Taha Maori's disappointment that this is so, and their encouragement to Tauwi to continue the dialogue. The members of the task group will be part of a continuing task group charged with the responsibility of facilitating dialogue in Tauwi, with Mission Resourcing and Te Taha Maori being in regular conversation.

Conference agreed to the memorial from Waikato-Waiariki synod which asks that the Church supports programmes aimed at national recognition of New Zealand's role as a promoter of peace, and the concern that WW1 and similar commemorations contribute a sense of violence and foreboding to our national identity.

The Conference concluded, as is customary, with a covenant service, in which business committees and conference members committed to continuing the work of the church throughout the year. In his reflection, President Tovia reminded us that while we are shaped by the past, it is how we are in the present that will shape our future- in other words, how we sow and grow will determine the harvest.

And then, Nelson-Marlborough-West Coast Synod joyfully handed the conference banner to Trinity College, who with Vahefonua Tonga and Te Taha Maori will be hosting next year's Conference at Wesley College, 1-5 October 2016 where President Elect Rev Prince Devanandan and Vice President Elect Viv Whimster will be inducted.

WANT TO SEE MORE?

The events of the opening weekend of Conference were recorded and are available online – see link at <http://www.methodist.org.nz/conference/2015>.

NEXT YEAR AT WESLEY COLLEGE AUCKLAND! 1 – 5 OCTOBER 2016

President Elect and Vice President Elect

Prince is Director of Mission and Ecumenical. He lives in Auckland and works from the Church Office in Ellerslie.

Viv is from Tauranga, is a member of Wesley Tauranga, Co-Convenor of the Methodist Lay Preachers Network and has served on both Taiwi Strategy and Council of Conference.