



# ORDINATION SERVICE

## ADDRESS

Methodist Conference 2016

*Wesley College*

Te Hāhi Weteriana O Aotearoa



# *Ordination Service Address*

**Sunday 2 October 2016**

**Wesley College, Paerata, Auckland**

**2:2016. Isaiah 53:1-10,  
Mark 10:35-45**

**“Not to be served, But to serve”**

Approximately six or seven weeks ago, Reverend Prince Devanandan, the then President Elect who is now the one-day-old inducted President, asked me if I could deliver the Ordination Charge for the service this afternoon.

His reasons were not only that the Conference’s normal practice is for the Ex President to preach, but also that the majority of the ordinands are those with Pacific Island descendants, so it would be appropriate for me to deliver the charge in which I could say whatever I like to the ordinands.

I said to myself,  
what a cunning Sri Lankan.  
What a typical Sri Lankan.  
Fancy telling the then President what to do. 😊

**Seriously though**, thank you President Prince for the invitation and the opportunity.  
I consider it an honour to do that for us today.

Hui Young Han, Oka Ieti, Matafonua Langi, Alipate Livani,  
and Siutaisa Tukutau:

You have been called: **“Not to be served, But to serve”**

Before elaborating on that,

it is my great pleasure to deliver this ordination charge  
and to be part of your ordination this afternoon.

And I’m sure I speak for all who have gathered here  
and for those of your family members, friends, and colleagues who  
were unable to attend,  
when I say to you - Congratulations! Well done!

Today, we are not only gathering to ordain you,  
but also to celebrate your achievement  
that is a result of your commitment, dedication, and perseverance  
through many days and hours of study.

In saying that, I’m sure, and believe,  
like many presbyters who have been travelling the same path, that your  
prime motive for offering and committing yourself  
to the ministry has always been,  
to serve God through serving the people.

Based on that, therefore, before the church sends you off to serve the  
community as ordained presbyters,  
I would charge you with three pieces of important advice.  
They are:

**First – “Go, and serve with respect.”**

I had the privilege to be invited  
along with some of our church leaders both Lay and Ordained to speak  
to one of the Trinity Theological College classes  
on the Topic – **Models of Leadership and Ministry within Te Hahi  
Weteriana o Aotearoa.**

In my introduction, I said to the students,  
“There is no one style or model of leadership that is better  
or more important than another.”

In other words, there is no one model that will be suitable for every  
situation, every environment,  
or the nature of any organisation you will be appointed to.

As for different organisations,  
different groups of people, have their own expectations, traditions,  
customs, needs, and methods of doing things.  
They have their own ways of being and their own protocols.

So, a good leader will make it their business to know and understand  
the culture, the nature, and the needs of the organisation or group that  
he or she is going to serve.

Then, I declared to the students,  
I did not intend to borrow from any model I'd had no experience or  
practice of, in my own life.

Rather, I **was** going to talk about the model  
I have committed myself to,  
based on the nature and context of our Church –  
The Methodist Church of New Zealand,  
Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa,  
with our Commitment to Biculturalism.

And that is – **The Cross-Cultural Model**

Then, we had an exercise where the students identified and talked  
about the diversity of cultures we have within our church. (as President  
Prince and Vice President Viv alluded to in their address yesterday.)  
For example,  
the different ethnicities, races, ages, and gender.

Following that, I shared my experiences of having been involved with  
cross-cultural ministry from day one of my entry into the Methodist  
Church in 1976 — which is now 40 years ago. (Do I look forty years and  
over? I don't think so. ;-))

From all those years, I've continued to learn —  
and regularly commit myself  
to appreciate,  
to value,  
to have empathy for,  
to be sensitive,  
to accept and  
to respect all people,

no matter who they are, or their situation in life –  
regardless of their culture, tradition, custom, language, colour,  
race, age, sexuality, theology and so on.

That is the true nature of this unique Church of ours,  
the Methodist Church of New Zealand  
Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa,  
where you have been called to serve your ministry –

**Go therefore, and serve the people with respect.**

Why am I saying that to you?

From experience.

One of the sources for some of the problems and issues I've come  
across is when a newly graduated presbyter,  
fresh from their training —

with all their new learning, new insights, and degrees,  
carries an attitude of

“Oh yeah, I've got them all; I know it all,”

and then goes into a parish and treats the people there as if they know  
nothing at all.

If any of you, the ordinands,  
have this or a similar sort of attitude,

I encourage you to think again,

**for the core value of building a close relationship  
with the people you have been called to serve**

-is to respect all people

no matter who they are and what their situation in life is.

We have learned from the New Testament reading this afternoon, the  
story of Mark —

about this two brothers, James and John; who say to Jesus, **“Teacher,  
we want you to do for us whatever we ask you to do?”**

Doesn't that sound rude? Doesn't that sound childish?

Then they go on to say:

“Grant to us that we may sit, one at your right hand,  
and one at your left hand, in your glory.”

And this is said just after Jesus has told the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to die.

I find it hard to imagine how James and John could be so dense – so uncaring, so insensitive and so disrespectful.

For you the ordinands-

**Go and serve the people with care and respect**

**Second – “Go and serve with humility”**

There is a Samoan proverb that goes like this:

**“O le ala i le Pule o le Tautua.”**

Meaning; **“The Pathway to Authority, is to serve.”**

This proverb originates from a time when a seat or position for a Paramount chief or the main orator was vacated in a Samoan family circle and needed to be filled or replaced.

Still today, a meeting will be organised for all leaders of the Tribe to which the family belongs —  
— across the Island and even those who live overseas —  
they will get together and start the process of selecting someone to take this position of leadership for the family.

In many cases, the non-titled person whose service stands out for the family and community —including the church and the village —

would be the leading candidate to be chosen.

When the decision is finally reached,

the people will recite the proverb:

**The Pathway to Authority is to serve.**

This is a reminder to the new title holder that he or she has been chosen as a result of their service,

and has now had bestowed upon him or her the chiefly title.

And that title carries with it the responsibility to serve the family and community.

As you can see, the journey is from service to status and then back to service.

In my view, this is with what Jesus' trying to explain to James and John. Let's hear the words of the conversation again:

*James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of You." And then He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one in Your left, in Your glory.*

The timing of this discussion with Jesus couldn't have been worse. As mentioned earlier, Jesus had just spoken with all of His disciples of His coming death, and it wasn't going to be a pleasant death. He would be mocked. He would be spit upon. He would be scourged. He would be killed. It's as if James and John didn't hear what Jesus was saying.

Their request demonstrates that they were in it totally for themselves. They were seeking status and reputation and power for themselves. Not only that, they were asking Jesus to fit into **their** plans.

However, Jesus replied to their request saying:  
"You do not know what you are asking.

Then He went on saying –  
"but to sit at my right hand or at my left hand is not mine to grant, but it is God alone to choose that."

Then Jesus called the whole of the twelve, as He knew it was not just James and John who had this desire, but the other ten disciples as well.

We read of how the other ten disciples  
"began to feel indignant with James and John."



They were angry.  
Thus, Jesus said to them...  
“whoever wishes to become great among you  
must be your servant,  
and whoever wishes to be first among you  
must be slave of all.  
For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”

What a powerful statement!  
Such a statement though, cannot be said by everyone – only by those  
who humble themselves.

Hui, Oka, Matafonua, Alipate and Siutaisa.

In the next few minutes,  
as a matter of fact, we will be ordaining you to another status.

You are moving from early growth in the life of the church and following  
your motivation to serve.

Some of you had already begun to serve in various ways in doing  
different tasks.

Then, you were **called** within a context of service,  
and you came to study at the Theological College where you were told  
through conscious and unconscious simples and methods that you  
were becoming important in the life of the church.  
So that finally, today, you are rightfully recognised by your ordination.

Without meaning to being judgemental,  
in several cases, the issue focused on here  
is some presbyters,  
who, after they have been ordained,  
seem to change from service to status.  
They then buy into all the simples  
and into the rewards of status.

Know that today, we are ordaining you to **service**, not to **status**.  
Therefore – go and serve with humility.

**Finally – “Go and serve with Love.”**

The conclusion of this passage reading from Mark verse 45 sums up the message that Jesus tried to explain to teach the disciples. And the words of Jesus again:

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,”  
then follow by the last part;  
**“and give His life, a ransom for many.”**

Jesus was not only teaching the disciples by words, but also draws the attention of the disciples to Himself as their example. Jesus said in effect,  
“As your Leader,  
I did not come to force people to serve me.  
I came here to devote my entire life to serving the people.”

This is based on His great and unconditional love for all.

To give His life as a ransom for many  
is the model that Jesus uses to demonstrate the life of those who have been called to serve —  
including you and me.

And “Giving His Life” alludes to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 that we have heard about in the Old Testament reading earlier today—  
where some of the verses say:

**Surely, he has borne our infirmities, and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our inequities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.**

He did this because of His love for all people in the world that He was sent to serve.  
For apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians-  
**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,**

**Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on the cross.**

Paul says, Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a servant. This is not saying he is nothing; What it does say is that because he was *something*, he was able to empty himself —  
— because of *somethingness*.

It is only because he was God that he was able to surrender that nature. And, therefore, for us it means: You can't give away something you don't have.

In relation to your calling, You must have love, growing and burning within you — you can't serve the people with love if you don't have it.

Love is the nature of Christ who called you in to service. So, in order to fulfil, equip, and embed that love within us, it is quite clear that no matter how intelligent we are, whatever achievements we have completed in our training, it will come to nothing, unless you do it through a conscious, abiding dependence on the enablement of Christ.

No matter what I say to you this afternoon, you must make it your aim for the rest of your ministry to discover in ever deeper experience what it means to live your life in Christ. It is the secret of all fruitfulness.

To be very specific, my brothers and sisters, so that you will remember it,

almost no minister of the gospel will be a spiritually fruitful person,  
and be able to give something to the people  
and serve them with love,  
if he or she does not commit to a devotional and prayerful life by setting  
aside a time for prayer and meditation,  
and continue to read and study the Bible each day —  
in addition to their sermon preparation and ministry work.

So go, therefore, and serve the people with respect, humility,  
and with love as you remember:

**For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.**

I leave you with these words of the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore,  
the first non-westerner to win the Nobel Prize in literature who wrote:

I slept and dreamt that life was joy;  
Then I awoke and realized that life was Service.  
And then I went to work – and, lo and behold,  
I discovered that Service is joy.

In conclusion:

may you and the parishes you have been called to serve become a  
successful and fruitful ministry for you.

May God's light shine through your paths.

May God's love and care be reflected through your life.

And may God's name be glorified as a result of serving the people with  
respect, humility and love in your ministry.

True happiness in serving the people  
comes from surrendering yourself completely  
in humble service to God through Christ Who said:  
For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

**Amen.**