



## METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER - December 2020

### **WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES - Christmas message**

In a special Christmas message, World Council of Churches (WCC) interim general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca reflects on fear, despair, hope and joy. “The child in the manger, in its vulnerability, is an image of fragile hope, the beginning of a new story that will culminate in the gift of life and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ,” he writes. “There have been and there are today many reasons to be afraid and to live in despair.”

In the most difficult days of history, Christians have time and again found consolation and hope during the Christmas season, he continues. “Celebrations of Christmas in churches and families this year will be tempered by the physical distancing and other restrictions brought on by our concern to protect each other from the coronavirus,” he writes. “People will grieve for the many dead around the world and will express their gratitude for those who care for the sick with great dedication and courage.”

The pandemic has everywhere torn the social fabric, and violence and war continue, Sauca reflects. “Even under these circumstances, however, there is a sound of angels in the air, proclaiming the birth of Christ with great joy,” he writes. “As Christians, we glimpse in this singular event, the birth of the child Jesus in a desolate village at the margins of the Roman empire, the fragile beginnings of our own redemption.”

Sauca also lifts up in prayer the people and leadership of WCC member churches, and all people on earth. “In a world of pain and death, the event of Christmas allows us to find consolation, lift our heads in hope, and glimpse in deep faith the triumph of life and love in the birth of Jesus,” he concludes. “This is good news of great joy for all people.”

Read the full WCC Christmas message, watch a Christmas video, download a Christmas card: [www.oikoumene.org/christmas](http://www.oikoumene.org/christmas)

### **THE ORDER OF ST STEPHEN LINKS TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AND BOUGAINVILLE**

The 1943 Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand passed a resolution founding the Order of St. Stephen. It was not until the founding of the Christian Youth Movement Methodist (CYMM) in 1950 that the Order came alive for members who were at least eighteen years of age. It would go on to operate for five decades.

The purpose of the Order was to enable young members of the Church to give a year’s service to the Church without remuneration – we might now call it a ‘gap-year’, or internship. In acknowledging the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Order’s start, Laurie Michie has reminded Mission and Ecumenical of how many young people serviced in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville through the order. A record of 129 members of the Order may be found on the Methodist Church Website under Archives, of which:

- 1956: two carpenters went to the Solomon Islands
- 1960: two teachers in the Solomon’s with one undertaking translating work
- 1961: a teacher, a pharmacist and a carpenter to Solomon’s

- 1962: three carpenters, one each working in the Papuan Highlands, Solomon Islands and New Zealand; and a teacher to the Solomon Islands
- 1963: one Tongan minister serving in the Solomon's, three teachers to the Solomon's, one nurse from England working in the Solomon's
- 1964: three teachers covering the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, two carpenters to the Solomon Islands
- 1965: one each for the Solomon's of electrician, builder, teacher
- 1966: two teachers and one local pastor in the Solomon Islands, one teacher Fiji, one office worker to the Solomon Islands.
- 1967: one assistant matron aged care to the Solomon Islands; one bacteriologist, one mechanic, three teachers; a carpenter to Papua New Guinea; one nurse to Arnhem Land; one dental nurse to Fiji.
- 1968: Solomon Island two carpenters and a builder; a nurse and a mechanic for Papua New Guinea; two teachers to Solomon's; a handyman for Bougainville
- 1969: one pastoral worker, three teachers, one nurse and one maintenance worker to Solomon Islands.

*"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
and there are varieties of service but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities..."*

### **GROWING A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND: to counter racism, discrimination and religious intolerance**

In February and March this year, the Office of Ethnic Communities organised hui in Dunedin, Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. Around 300 people from faith communities and interfaith organisations from across Aotearoa New Zealand attended these sessions. A number of Methodists were present at each of these sessions.

In light of the Mosque Attacks of March 2019, and the realisation that inclusiveness is not felt by a number of people in our society (particularly of religion) ... the question is more crucial than ever, of what we can all do to ensure that Aotearoa New Zealand does not provide an environment for discrimination, racism and religious intolerance.

Recently a report from these hui was produced, and can be found at the website: [Connecting with Faith Communities and Interfaith Groups report – November 2020 | Office of Ethnic Communities](#)

The key themes arising from the hui were:

1. Enhancing collaboration. There is much important work already happening in Aotearoa New Zealand, either within more established interfaith groups or among faith communities themselves. However, this work is limited, and many attendees would like to see such activities being strengthened and expanded beyond those usually involved.



2. The importance of education in normalising faith and ethnic diversity. This includes having an education system which reflects the diversity of its school communities and takes a lead in preparing students for diversity. Attendees see the education system as having a strong role in addressing stereotypes, racism, and discrimination.
3. The importance of the media in promoting social inclusion. This includes ensuring messages are delivered to the wider community which represent diverse faith communities accurately, positively and without bias
4. Community-led action. Recognising that while Government can be an enabler, locally- led and community driven action is usually better placed to make a difference.
5. Better connection and collaboration with Government. There was a desire to strengthen the relationship between faith communities, interfaith groups, and Government.

What does social inclusion look like as part of an ecumenical and interfaith orientation? For many, social inclusion means acceptance, belonging and the freedom to express their faith, ethnicity/culture and beliefs safely, without judgement, discrimination, or threat. Do we allow people to be proud of their faith and ethnicity/culture, rather than feeling the need to moderate what they say and how they dress, speak and act to gain acceptance, or feel welcomed? Are we sure that people of other faith communities feel connected, safe, respected, accepted and understood? When Christian communities are invited to be part of public and civic occasions, are other faith communities also involved?

Below is a graphic representation of the conversations at one of the hui (source: *Connecting with Faith Communities and Interfaith Groups* report; Office of Ethnic Communities November 2020)



Many faith communities and interfaith groups are also strong champions for social justice and change; and this has included many Methodists individually, and sometimes formally through parishes, rohe, and missions. How might we take action ourselves through community-led initiatives, or enhance collaboration and inclusion through opportunities to work together with others which will positively impact social inclusion and participation?

### **PACIFIC CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES – leader’s forum**

The annual leader’s forum of Pacific Conference of Churches, of which Methodist Church of New Zealand is a member, was held via Zoom on 1-3 December 2020. Acting Director Rev Tony Franklin-Ross participated over the three days for Methodist Church of New Zealand, along with Rev Tara Tautari as General Secretary for part of the meeting. The theme for this year’s virtual meeting was *Toward a Resilient Household of God in the Pacific*.

Many churches across the Pacific either did not have their annual meetings/Conferences/Assemblies; or they were significantly adjusted – because of Covid-19. Leaders shared the Covid has highlighted many underlying issues for peoples, and a need to be creative in ways of responding, and continuing to care for each other and the ‘lost and the least’.

Self-determination is a key theme for the Pacific Conference of Churches, and as the first day of the meeting was on 1 December – Morning Star Day – time was taken to share of the independence aspirations of the people of Tanah Papua (West Papua). Leaders from the region reflected on “Where is God?” in the experiences of the migrant biased policy of the Indonesian government (which favours migrants to the area over indigenous Papuans), and the recent experiences of violence and killings of church people. Pacific Conference of Churches is working with the Pacific Forum in pressing for a UN humanitarian response.

A briefing was also given on the framework for *Child Safe Churches and Ending Violence Against Children*, an initiative of Pacific Conference of Churches. An ecumenical enabler has been contracted, in association with UNICEF, to develop this programme for use across Pacific Conference of Churches member churches. Shockingly, a 2019 report indicated 70-80% of children in eight Pacific Island states experienced some form of violence. A trial programme is currently underway within the Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, and Fiji. The programme gives an important contextualisation of child safety concerns within Pacific cultures and theologies, that can be used as a framework for member churches. The goal is to mainstream the impact of the project’s mahi and ethos so that the Pacific household of God becomes the safest institution(s) for all, especially for children and young people.

A presentation was given on the ‘Blue Economy’ and the issue of deep sea mining. The concept of the ‘Blue Economy’ is being offered to the Pacific as a model for making the ocean a key to sustainable development for small Pacific Island states. However, there is a growing concern that this risks privatising and commodifying the ocean and its life-giving creation. Could a counter narrative of the “Blue Pacific” rather encapsulate Pacific culture, theology and narrative to its oceans, and be paired with sustainable goals.

Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Forum (below screen shot - pictured right), made a keynote presentation. Dame Meg reflected on the essence that holds peoples together in the Pacific and offers a hope for resilience, which includes: the shared identity, shared ocean, and often a shared faith; a need to listen to the differences which enrich the household family of Pacifica peoples; and that recognises the strength of the collective. A challenge was also made to Pacific churches to recognise the influence that they hold, and to realise the times when that influence needs to be critiqued. As a woman in leadership, Dame Meg found the churches were often the places of greatest resistance to women exercising leadership.



### **Mission and Ecumenical Report to Conference 2020**

The Methodist Church of New Zealand Conference for 2020 was downscaled as a precaution around Covid-19 implications (both for health and regulations). Mission & Ecumenical prepared a report for the Conference, which can be found in Section H of the full Conference reports document, at the following website link: <http://www.methodist.org.nz/conference/2020/index>

Christmas Greetings from Mission and Ecumenical!

**MISSION AND ECUMENICAL BOARD**  
**Methodist Church of New Zealand**  
**Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa**  
*Director: Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross*  
Office: 409 Great South Road, Penrose  
Postal: Private Bag 11 903, Ellerslie, Auckland 1542  
Phone: 09-571 9142 Mobile: 021-481 816  
E-mail: [mm-e@methodist.org.nz](mailto:mm-e@methodist.org.nz)