



Balancing Rights and Protection under Covid-19

Ruby Manukia-Schaumkel

The government imposed stringent restrictions on movement and association during the national lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19. It is also finding ways of contact tracing and tracking, which presents an unprecedented challenge to people's privacy.

There were questions about the Covid-19 Public Health Response Bill, and whether the sweeping police powers were a breach of privacy. Furthermore, the government announced a 10-person limit at religious services, weddings and funerals/tangi at Alert Level 2 *, while



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restaurants, shopping malls and movie theatres were allowed up to 100 people. Funerals were later raised to a 50-person limit.

Given the restrictions imposed during the

lockdown, church services were conducted online. This posed protection issues for the safety of children with online content and led me to draft correspondence for the Security for Online Children Content. The same protection for the Church, for people working with children, applies to online children content; anyone working with children should be vetted as part of a Children's Worker Safety Check under

the Children's Act 2014. Children's worker safety checking helps identify the small number of people who pose a risk to children. A children's worker is anyone whose work involves regular or overnight contact with children.

These are unprecedented times for New Zealand. While the Covid-19 response should be cautiously managed, it raises potential interference with civil liberties. In the midst of the pandemic, the recognition of our rights and freedoms can be lost if we are not able to recognise and protect them. Privacy is a fundamental right of every human being under the rule of law, not simply a privilege to enjoy when times are good. The same protection applies to the Right of Religious Freedom under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (BoRA) that affirms the right to freedom of religion and belief. The Human Rights Act 1993 (HRA) prohibits discrimination based on religious and ethical belief.

The disparate restrictions tested the patience and resilience of churches to cope and abide by government directive. It provoked external organisations to question the democratic process of passing legislation such as the Covid-19 Public Health Response Bill.

Organisations, including the Human Rights Commission, the NZ Council for Civil Liberties, Amnesty NZ and others, were concerned with the loss of democratic liberties. The Covid-19 Public Health Response Bill creates a bespoke legal framework for managing the public health risks posed by Covid-19 over the next two years, supplementing existing powers. There is uncertainty over whether or not the bill is consistent with the rights and freedoms affirmed in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990. There should be a balance of rights and freedoms versus the protection to contain the spread of Covid-19.

**At noon on Friday 29 May this limit increased to 100.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Grants Nurture Talents



Dr Emily Colgan

“Poipoia te kākano, kia puawai: Nurture the seed and it will blossom.”

A commitment to nurturing gifts so that ministry can be enhanced lies behind the work of the Methodist Professional Development Grants (PDG) committee. Every year, the committee makes grants available to enable lay and ordained members to undertake a range of professional development opportunities.

Committee convenor, Rev Dr Susan Thompson, believes that leadership formation is essential for Te Hāhi. “Our

leaders need to be well-prepared to face the challenges of a rapidly-changing world,” she says.

Grants are focused on supporting study which will enhance people's theological development, give them the skills to empower others and be of benefit to Church and community in Aotearoa New Zealand. In making grants, the committee seeks to reflect the diversity of the Church, offer opportunities to first-time applicants and young people, and resource as many people as possible from a limited pool of funding.

Every year, the committee receives a variety of applications, including requests for support to undertake graduate and postgraduate academic study, enhance practical skills for ministry and attend ecumenical international events.

In 2019, a PDG allowed Dr Emily Colgan from Trinity Methodist Theological College to attend the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held in San Diego. Emily appreciated the chance to engage with cutting-edge biblical scholarship and she presented two papers which were well-received. She engaged with Pasifika scholars who shared their insights, and was voted onto the editorial board of the International Voices in Biblical Studies series. She returned home feeling enthusiastic and better-equipped for her work as a lecturer and researcher, and is grateful to PDG for this opportunity.

Dianne Sundberg, from the Western Bay of Plenty Circuit, equipped herself for a new vocation as a funeral celebrant with her PDG. During 2019, Dianne undertook four weekend study courses offered by the Celebrant School, Te Wānanga Korowai Aroha. A mix of theoretical input and practical learning, the workshops included opportunities to prepare and present a practice ceremony and to receive constructive feedback. Dianne appreciated

the support to pursue her training in a new ministry. “I don't think it can ever be too late to venture into the unknown,” she said.

Last year, PDGs also supported applicants attending a Sinoti Samoa lay preachers' training camp, the Talanoa Oceania Conference, a joint Waikato-Wairariki and Lower North Island Synod Transitional Ministry course and training for spiritual directors. The committee's total distribution for the year was \$23,315.

The PDG is a bicultural committee which means that half of its funds are available for applicants from Te Taha Māori and half for applicants from Tauwiwi. Either partner may, from time to time, make funds available to the other partner. “The committee has appreciated the generosity shown by Te Taha Māori who have often made their portion of funds available for Tauwiwi applicants,” Susan says.

Application forms for PDG grants are available on the Methodist website or from the committee secretary, Mary West maryw@west.net.nz. There are two further rounds of applications for 2020, closing on 15 August and 15 November.



PAC Distribution Group

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Grant requests close 30 June 2020

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Wendy Keir wendyk@methodist.org.nz