



July 2025



## Welcome to the monthly newsletter of the Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana Aotearoa

The Connexional Office

### Message from the General Secretary – Rev Tara Tautari

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.

Kia ora e te whānau,

This past month has held a deep mix of moments—some stretching, some tender, and all reminding me of the extraordinary heartbeat of our Connexion.

I had the privilege of visiting Donald Phillipps in Ōtepoti as part of our Maea Te Kupu: Voices of Legacy and Hope oral storytelling project. Sitting with Donald, listening to the threads of memory, theology, and conviction that have shaped our Hāhi, reminded me that storytelling is not a luxury, it's a form of faithfulness. (More on that project soon!)

We also marked an important step in our journey of accountability and healing with the first phase of our Redress Scheme Review. A hui with the Independent Coordinator and Review Panel brought together courageous voices, careful questions, and a shared desire to do better - honouring survivors and grounding our processes in justice, manaakitanga, and truth.

This month, I joined others sleeping rough for one night in Auckland as part of the Lifewise Big Sleepout. I was especially strengthened by the presence of our Sinoti Samoa Presbyters and their wives, as well as Taha Māori Tamaki Rohe members. To witness their solidarity and commitment in such a tangible way was powerful. It was cold, yes, but the cold isn't the hardest part. The hardest part is knowing how many call that reality permanent.

Another significant milestone came as I co-facilitated our first Disability and the Church Wānanga, a space of rich theological reflection, vulnerability, and grace. It was a reminder that inclusion is not an optional extra—it is gospel work.

Alongside these special moments were the ongoing rhythms of Connexional life: committees, planning meetings, and pastoral support across the motu. I want to take a moment here to acknowledge our people in the Nelson Tasman rohe and elsewhere who have faced recent flooding and disruption. And I hold in prayer those carrying grief and anxiety in the face of the international crises that confront us daily.

Amidst it all, I've found myself returning again and again to the question: what holds it all together?

And I believe the answer is this: **relationships grounded in love and courage.**



The love that shows up in quiet pastoral moments.  
The courage that speaks truth in a review hui.  
The hope that stretches itself into the cold for the sake of someone else's warmth.  
The whakapapa that tells us where we've come from, and the Spirit that tells us who we're becoming.

I was proud, truly proud, to watch members of our Church stand up and speak out in the recent oral submissions for the Regulatory Standards Bill. To hear their voices calling for justice, inclusion, and integrity reminded me that our Church is alive, awake, and active.

Christ is with us, in memory and in movement, in stillness and in struggle. And we, together, are held.

Ngā manaakitanga,  
**Tara**



## Aucklanders Unite to Tackle Homelessness at the Lifewise Big Sleepout 2025

Melinda San Diego

10-11 July – on a chilly winter night at AUT's Hikuwai Plaza, over 60 leaders from churches, businesses, and community organisations came together for a powerful cause: to shine a light on homelessness in Aotearoa. The Big Sleepout 2025 was more than just a symbolic gesture; it was a heartfelt call to action.

This year's event was beautifully guided by Maungarongo Tito, Chair of Hui Pōari, the formal governance body for Te Taha Māori o Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa. His presence brought warmth, wisdom, and a deep sense of connection to the kaupapa.



We were also honoured to be joined by Rev. Tara Tautari, General Secretary of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, along with representatives from Sinoti Samoa – highlighting the strong involvement and support of our Methodist Church leaders in this important cause.

Participants gave up the comfort of their beds for a night, sleeping on cardboard to gain a small glimpse into the reality faced by many of our street whānau. But the event was not just about discomfort – it was about understanding, empathy, and unity.

The evening featured six powerful guest speakers – Six, Tammie Parker, Saskia Hawke, Shogun, and Joe Daymond – each sharing their lived experiences of homelessness. Their stories were raw, honest, and deeply moving, offering insight into the many pathways that can lead someone to life on the streets.



Adding to the emotional depth of the night, two of our kaimahi, Kat'z and Shadow, premiered a short film they created, with various interviews of our street whānau, offering a poignant and personal look into life without shelter.

Our street whānau were also allowed to showcase their talents through an art exhibition, with many pieces available for purchase. The Auckland Street Choir, led by former Lifewise Chair Rohan McMahon, lifted spirits with their soulful waiata.

According to Pam Elgar, the Methodist Mission Northern Executive Chair, "This event has been brought back after a five-year hiatus... because homelessness is still a major issue for our country. There's been an increasing number of homeless in Auckland as evidenced by [Auckland Council's own numbers](#) and that's only scratching the surface. It's not counting all the people that are hidden homeless."

Funds raised from the event – over \$170,000 so far – will go directly to Merge Café and Community, a vital hub for Auckland's street whānau. Merge Café offers more than hot meals; it's a place of connection, support and hope. Staff, peer support workers, and volunteers provide a welcoming space and help link individuals to Lifewise's myriad of social services. Donations are still being accepted. To contribute, visit [bigsleepout.org.nz](https://bigsleepout.org.nz) – every little bit makes a difference.



### **From Access to Transformation: A Call from the Disability Wānanga**

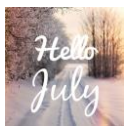
The Wānanga on Disability and the Church was held from 18–20 July, beginning with a fellowship meal and grounded in whakawhanaungatanga—the building of genuine relationships as a foundation for collective reflection, truth-telling, and transformation.

Throughout the Wānanga, participants shared deeply personal experiences that revealed the complex and often contradictory reality of disabled people within the life of the Church. Many spoke of the Church as a place of refuge and healing, while others described exclusion, theological harm, and the painful impact of being misunderstood or unseen.

It became clear that inclusion must go far beyond physical access. True accessibility encompasses how we communicate, the assumptions we carry, and the cultures we create. Participants called for language, theology, and leadership practices that affirm the dignity, agency, and voice of disabled people.







Disability was also named as a collective and cultural reality, not just something affecting individuals, but entire whānau and communities. Harmful narratives, such as linking disability with sin or punishment, require both healing and theological reformation.

At the heart of the Wānanga's call was a powerful challenge: to move the Church from token inclusion to power-sharing and mutual transformation. This is not about being 'nice'—it is about justice, partnership, and the full embodiment of Christ's body.

Grounded in the covenantal spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Church is invited into a deeper, Spirit-led journey of becoming a place where every person, disabled or not, is seen, heard, and empowered to lead.

---

### Conference 2025 – Preparations Update

Planning for Conference 2025 is well underway. With key milestones in place and a clear theological and practical vision guiding us, we look forward to gathering *online* from Mornington Methodist Church, Dunedin, from 11–15 November.

### Theme and Programme

The theme for this year's Conference is God's Aroha – A Call to Sacred Transformation. Together, we will explore how divine love reshapes our lives, our relationships, and the mission of the Church. Rooted in our bicultural covenant, this theme calls us to live out transformation through *kaitiakitanga*, justice, and communal renewal.

We have important work ahead. Synods and Hui Poari have already received several key papers, including:

- The Responsible Investment Policy (updated)
- The Connexional Property Strategy Progress Report
- A Discussion Paper on the Purpose and Efficacy of Our Statistical Reporting
- Climate Induced Displacement Policy

Connexional committees are also preparing their annual reports, reflecting the breadth and depth of work happening across Te Hāhi.

### Registration

Registrations open on Monday 4 August 2025. The cost is \$170 (GST inclusive). Please note that there is no early bird rate this year.

### As We Prepare

We invite your prayers, your energy, and your ideas. If you have suggestions for how we can strengthen engagement or deepen reflection during Conference, we'd love to hear from you. This is more than a meeting. It is a moment of movement. May we come ready to be reshaped by aroha and sent forth as a Church transformed to transform.

---

### Lay Preachers Network – Zoom Training Series (July to October 2025)

Viv Whimster and Ngaire Southon

The Lay Preachers Network is pleased to offer a new series of online sessions designed to support and equip both new and experienced Lay Preachers. These sessions are open to all and are especially suited for those exploring a call to lay preaching, those beginning to lead worship, or anyone interested in ongoing theological and biblical learning.

### Wednesday 30 July

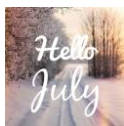
Resources for Lay Preaching

Led by Philip Garside, accredited Lay Preacher and publisher (Philip Garside Publishing)

### Wednesday 20 August

Rivers of Connexion – The Bicultural Journey





Led by Rev Keita Hotere, Minita-i-tohia, Taranaki  
and TeRito Peyroux, accredited Lay Preacher and former Vice-President of MCNZ

### **Wednesday 24 September**

Parables – Session One

Led by Rev Dr Geoff New, Principal, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

### **Wednesday 29 October**

Parables – Session Two

Led by Rev Dr Geoff New

All sessions begin at 7.30pm. The Zoom link will open a little earlier for those who wish to join ahead of time.

### **Zoom Link:**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84939560503?pwd=FcLVPrPaseGuM0xtae1VzENG2JEL6.1>

**Meeting ID: 849 3956 0503**

**Passcode: 437291**

### **Registration**

To receive any recommended pre-reading (especially for the July and August sessions), please register with:

Viv Whimster – [email](#) or 021 137 2349

Ngaire Southon – [email](#) or 021 0224 5165

Please circulate this invitation widely within your parish or Synod. These sessions provide a valuable opportunity for training and connection in the ministry of Lay Preaching.



### **A webinar for Pastors: 'Moving On: Ministry Transitions Seminar'**

Wednesday 17 September, 1.30-3.00pm.

For anyone in ministry who is considering a change or in the process of moving on. This 90 minute online seminar will cover the emotional, spiritual and pastoral aspects of concluding a ministry. Drawing on Biblical

themes, Silvia Purdie will present from her research into the unique challenges of ministry transitions, plus practical pointers for ending well.

Silvia Purdie is a Presbyterian minister, counsellor and supervisor, based in Upper Hutt. Three years of extensive research and interviews formed her book: 'Moving On: Grief in Ministry Transitions'

Seminar cost: \$30

To register [click here](#).

Training provided by [Conversations Seminars](#).





## Church + AI – We’re collecting stories

Peter Lane

**d|c|t (the Diaconate of Church Technologists)** is creating a new resource to help churches engage thoughtfully and faithfully with artificial intelligence — exploring what’s helpful, what’s concerning, and what’s already emerging in our ministry spaces.

To make this resource real and relevant, **we’re collecting true stories from across the Church** — moments that are hopeful, hilarious, inspiring, or even a bit alarming.

Has someone in your congregation used ChatGPT to write a sermon? Tried AI-generated art for a worship banner? Encountered something unexpectedly strange from a chatbot in a pastoral care moment?

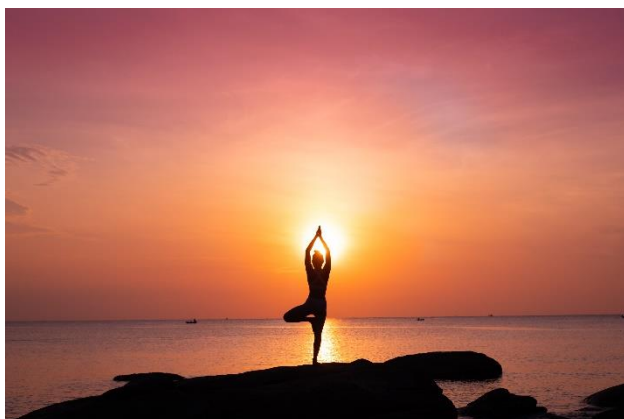
**We’d love to hear about it.** Your stories will help shape a guide that’s practical, grounded, and rooted in lived experience.

👉 [Share your story.](#)



## Prayer Focus

E te Atua, in this season of stillness and turning inward, help us find warmth in one another and courage in Your calling. As the land rests, may we listen deeply, for the healing of our people, our places, and our purpose. Āmine.



## Meditation

The soil sleeps, but the Spirit stirs.  
Stillness is not silence.  
In the hush, something holy begins again.  
Wait.  
Listen.  
The dark holds seeds.