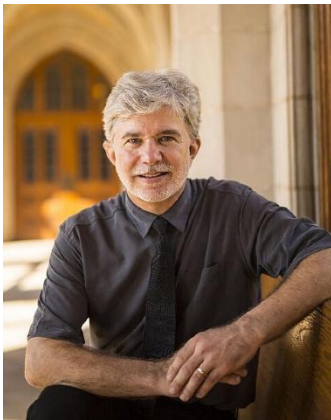




Revisioning Methodism: Seminars with Professor Joerg Rieger

Rev Abhishek Solomon, Trinity Theological College

Trinity College recently had the privilege of hosting Dr Joerg Rieger, Distinguished Professor of Theology and Cal Turner Chancellor's Chair of Wesleyan Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

A lifelong Methodist, Rieger is widely recognised for his theological work on grace, justice, and solidarity within the Wesleyan tradition. Trinity College was delighted to offer his visit as a resource to the wider connexion through three regional seminars. Participants across Synods expressed appreciation for the depth and relevance of his challenge to "revision" Methodism for our own time, returning to its roots in grace while reimagining its future in today's world of economic inequality, social division, and ecological pressure.

Grace Under Pressure: Revisiting the Means of Grace

Rieger reminded us that John Wesley's theology of grace is not a private or purely spiritual enterprise but a dynamic relationship with God and neighbour. The traditional "means of grace," scripture, prayer, and Holy Communion, are only half the story. Wesley also understood works of mercy, which included acts of compassion, justice, and solidarity. These are means of grace in their own right, essential channels through which God transforms both giver and receiver. Rieger emphasised that Wesley placed these works of mercy at the very heart of discipleship, even suggesting that when charity and prayer come into conflict, mercy must take precedence. To paraphrase Rieger, Methodism's vitality lies in the fusion of piety and mercy, personal devotion and social engagement, inward faith and outward action.

Beyond Charity, Service, and Advocacy

Rieger noted that contemporary Christianity often understands works of mercy through the lenses of charity, service, or advocacy. While each has its place, he suggested that these approaches tend to remain one-directional, where the one doing the work of charity acts for others rather than with them. Charity provides relief but can unintentionally reinforce dependency; service expresses care but often leaves existing systems untouched; and advocacy, though more prophetic in spirit, may still assume the advocate speaks for those without a voice, instead of with them. In this sense, such forms of engagement, while valuable, risk maintaining the very structures that create inequality and suffering. They produce reform at best, while seldom leading to the kind of transformation that Wesley envisioned, a transformation grounded in grace that reshapes relationships and communities at their core.

Towards Deep Solidarity

Rieger invited participants to imagine a more profound expression of grace in what he calls "deep solidarity." Deep solidarity is not about acts of generosity or moral obligation from those who have toward those who lack; it is about recognising our shared vulnerability and discovering God's presence together in the pressures of life. Rather than positioning the church as a helper or advocate from above, this approach calls Christians to stand alongside others in mutual dependence, allowing the struggles of the world to transform all involved.

Wesley's ministry among miners, prisoners, and the sick revealed that grace is most under pressure, a site where human dignity is threatened and hope is desperately needed. In this framework, the familiar works of piety are reimagined: reading Scripture becomes listening to

it through the experiences of the marginalised, prayer becomes an act of attentiveness to the cries of the world, and Holy Communion becomes a shared table of reconciliation and mutual transformation. For Rieger, this is where authentic revival begins. Not in moments of spiritual elation, but in shared struggle and faithful presence amid the world's pain.

From Reform to Revolution

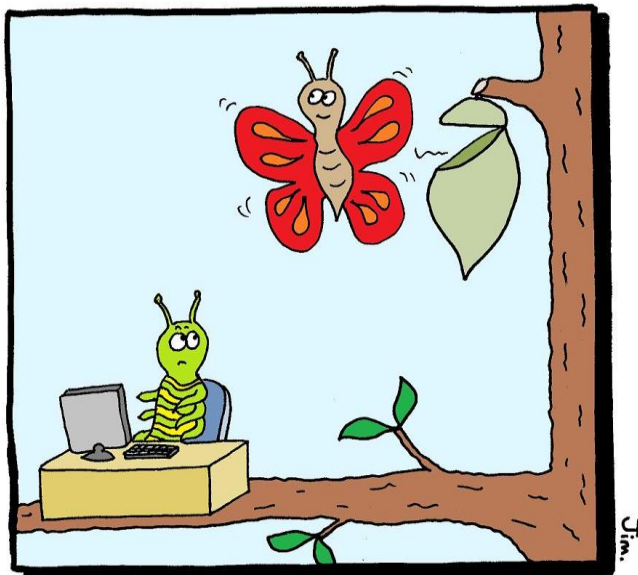
Rieger contrasted reform, incremental adjustment within existing systems, with revolution, a term he used theologically to describe the radical reordering of relationships that grace makes possible. Deep solidarity, he said, is not about earning salvation through works, but about opening ourselves to God's transforming grace that reorders our relationships with one another, with creation, and with God.

Consequently, true revival will not come through better organisation or institutional rearrangement, but through participation in God's revolution of grace under pressure. It is a revolution that draws us into communion with those who suffer and calls us to embody new patterns of justice, mercy, and hope.

Implications for Methodism in Aotearoa

Rieger's challenge resonates deeply with the questions facing Methodism in Aotearoa today. As a church navigating cultural change, demographic shifts, and questions of justice and mission, his call invites us not to "move the chairs on the deck," but to open ourselves to transformation in both confession and action. To revise Methodism in our context means reclaiming grace as a living, relational force that transforms inner lives and external structures, rediscovering ministry as mutual solidarity rather than service from a distance and allowing God's grace to transform the church's identity as a community of compassion and justice.

A shared theme across the three seminars was that our challenge extends beyond just institutional survival to include a spiritual revolution, a reawakening of the Wesleyan belief that God's grace is most actively at work where the world experiences its deepest pain.



Dave vowed he'd start his own journey of sacred transformation, as soon as he finished this email.

Jim's Cartoon

Brendan Boughen

Our regular cartoon from Jim, that finds the funny, and sometimes not so funny, side of faith.



Whose Creed?

Rev Dr Nāsili Vaka'uta

The Nicene Creed is a foreign text. It was not born in Oceania. It did not grow from chants beneath Pacific skies or the wisdom of the Moana. It was hammered out in 325 CE in the imperial council of Nicaea, under Emperor Constantine's eye. What Christians remember as a confession of faith was also a political settlement, designed to silence dissent and enforce conformity. It was an act of empire as much as theology.

This year, the global church will celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the Creed. Cathedrals in Rome and Europe will host liturgies and conferences, hailing its endurance as the foundation of Christian unity. Yet anniversaries are not only for celebration. They are also moments of truth-telling. From Oceania's shores, we must remember that the Creed arrived here on colonial ships. Missionaries used it as a tool of discipline. Islanders were told to prove their faith by reciting foreign words, often with little space to weave their own cosmologies, genealogies, and relationships into the confession.

Asking "Whose Creed?" is therefore more than historical curiosity. It is a decolonial question. *Whose power shaped it? Whose boundaries did it enforce? Whose bodies did it police, and whose voices did it silence?* In Oceania, orthodoxy has often meant the suppression of Indigenous practices, the reshaping of communities into colonial molds, and the policing of Pasifika bodies, genders, and desires. A decolonial stance refuses to let that history pass unchallenged. But decolonial work is never only about critique; it is also about liberation. The challenge is whether this Creed, forged in empire, can be reclaimed as a confession of freedom. *Can Oceania speak it anew, not as a colonial relic, but as a living song of resistance and hope?*

To do so means hearing it Moana-wise. When we confess belief in the Creator, we must speak of oceans rising, islands threatened, and creation as covenant and kinship. When we say "Begotten, not made" cannot remain abstract philosophy; it must resonate with Pacific genealogies where begetting and making are entwined acts of kinship. And when we affirm "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," it must no longer echo Rome's authority but call us to radical hospitality—a household wide enough for women and men, queer and straight, migrant and local, doubter and dreamer alike.

Liberation also demands *que(e)rying* the Creed. For too long it has been wielded to enforce binaries—orthodox/heretic, saved/damned, male/female, pure/impure—that exclude and harm. In Oceania, these categories have silenced *fa'afafine* and *vakasalewalewa*, erased gender diversity, and suppressed women's leadership. To *que(e)ry* the Creed is to resist this violence and insist that confession must affirm abundance, relationality, and inclusion.

Europe will mark the 1700th anniversary with triumphal declarations. Oceania must mark it with truth-telling. We must name the ships that carried the Creed to our shores, the tongues it silenced, the bodies it disciplined. We must remember that faith here has never been static but has always been embodied, relational, and open to the sea's vastness.

But do we need to make the Creed our own? The honest answer is no. Moana peoples do not need the Nicene Creed to be Christian or to know God. We already have cosmologies, genealogies, and stories that confess the Creator, affirm kinship, and sustain life. *Our faith does not depend on owning a text born in empire.* And yet, we may still choose to subvert it—to bend it away from Constantine and toward liberation, to let its words be unsettled by the ocean, reshaped in our tongues, and infused with our struggles for justice. That is not assimilation; it is resistance.

When we rise and say “We believe,” it should not be Constantine’s voice echoing through us or the missionaries’ command on our lips. It should be our own people speaking—grounded in the land and sea, open to the Spirit who moves where empire cannot. The Creed may remain foreign, but we can still turn it into a site of struggle, a dangerous memory, a witness not to empire’s authority but to God’s freedom.

We do not need to make the Creed our own. But if we dare to interrogate it decolonially and speak it liberatively, we can transform it from borrowed words into an Oceanic act of resistance. And then “we believe” will mean not empire’s creed but our own living song—fluid, fierce, and free.



OUR PEOPLE



Entire Church Mourns a Grateful, Grounded, Gracious Servant of God

We share a tribute Rev Tara Tautari, General Secretary MCNZ, delivered at the funeral service for Rev Donald Phillipps, in Dunedin on 11 October.

It is a singular honour to bring the love and prayerful embrace of the whole Connexion to the whānau and loved ones of the Rev Donald Phillipps. The Church joins you, in mourning one whose life blessed us deeply, and in thanksgiving for the grace and the light that shone so clearly in him.

Kororia ki Te Atua i runga rawa, Te Kaihanga o ngā mea katoa, Te tīmatanga me te otinga, te Ārepa me te Ōmekaka. E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā hau e whā, tēnā koutou. Ki te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, tēnā koutou.

Our hearts are joined with yours in the fellowship of aroha, grateful for the wisdom, the humility, and the steadfast service that Donald offered to Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa — a servant of God whose words and deeds continue to shape our journey in this whenua.

How wonderful it is to be known by your own words. So it was with Donald — a writer, a thinker, a man whose words continue to speak, even now. Though his voice is stilled, the truth he lived, still leads us. He taught us that faith is not something you just talk about, it’s something you *do*. It’s how you treat people. It’s the way you show grace under pressure, courage in confusion, and kindness when no one’s watching.

Donald knew that words matter, because they shape the world we build together. Through his sermons, reflections, and writings, he invited us to see faith not as fixed doctrine, but as a living story, unfolding in the life of Aotearoa, in the relationships we form, and in the justice we seek. He traced his spiritual whakapapa to the early Wesleyans, yet he was never content to leave history in the past. For Donald, the past was a teacher, the present a responsibility, and the future a sacred trust.

In every role — chaplain, superintendent, historian, member of Connexional Boards and Committees, President of Conference, Acting General Secretary —he led not by demanding attention, but by creating space. He listened. He asked questions that made others think more deeply. He believed that discernment is born not of ego, but of community.

He led by conversation and by example. Even in retirement, his mind and spirit remained luminous. He never stopped preaching, never stopped writing, never stopped mentoring. Because Donald believed that as long as there is breath in us, there is more truth to seek, more compassion to give. At the heart of Donald’s vision for the Church was his unwavering commitment to the bicultural journey, not as theory, but as covenant. He saw in Te Tiriti o Waitangi not just a document, but a promise that justice and mercy belong together. That our strength comes not from sameness, but from partnership.

As we farewell Donald, it feels as though the ground shifts a little beneath us. And we find ourselves, as he so often helped us do, learning how to stand steady again. His absence is felt not only by those who knew him well, but by the whole Connexion. Because Donald had a quiet way of steadying us, through times of change and uncertainty, through debate and discernment, reminding us who we are, and who we are called to be.

Beyond the titles and responsibilities, there was the man himself: reflective, humble, and deeply human. A man who loved his family, who cared deeply for his community, who kept faith with his God.

The last time I spoke with Donald was in July, when my sister and I visited him at his home. We talked about the Church, about its challenges and its hopes. He said, with that familiar spark in his voice, "I've got a lot of things I still want to say, still things I want to talk about."

And then he smiled, leaving us with words that reveal the heart of his journey: "When I write history, I write about the future."

That was Donald, always reaching forward, even as he honoured the past. And as he spoke of his whānau, his voice softened. "I'm just the luckiest father," he said. "Really am."

That's who he was — grateful, grounded, gracious. Today, we give thanks for Donald's life, for his faith, and for the countless ways he shaped ours. He reminded us that faith is not about clinging to what was, but trusting what can yet be. And in that trust, he showed us how to walk humbly, think deeply, and love generously.

E te rangatira, te pononga tūturu o te Atua — haere, haere, haere ki ngā ringaringa o Te Hēpara Pai. Moe mai, moe mai, moe mai, i roto i te rangimārie a Te Ariki.



MCNZ CONFERENCE 2025

Theme "God's Aroha – A Call to Sacred Transformation"

Conference 2025 will be hosted online from Mornington Methodist Parish, Dunedin from 11–15 November. The programme blends live sessions with pre-recorded segments, allowing full participation from across the Connexion.

After Tauwi and Te Taha Māori meetings, Conference will open with a Pōwhiri and the Service to Honour Those Who Have Died. Over the course of the next three days, reports will be presented and three plenary sessions - featuring theologians and practitioners offering insights and challenges – will reflect on the theme "God's Aroha – A Call to Sacred Transformation".

The plenary sessions will explore different dimensions of how divine love renews faith, relationships, and creation.

- Whakapapa and Faith – identity and story
- He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata! – relational and structural transformation
- Ko au te taiao, ko te taiao ko au! – ecological transformation

Proceedings will conclude on Saturday with the Recognition of Retirees and the Covenant Service, livestreamed from Dunedin.

Special Events

The Wesley Historical Society Lecture and Panel on Palestine will be livestreamed on Thursday evening. The lecture will be delivered by Rev Dr Nāsili Vaka'uta, Principal of Trinity College.

Conference will also endorse Connexional appointments for the Wesley College Chaplain and Kai Hāpai Rangatahi, affirming leadership that supports the Church's ongoing mission and transformation.



A Time of Renewal for Wesley College Boarding

Wesley College is entering a new chapter – one defined by renewal, reflection, and a deep recommitment to the values of care, respect, and service on which the school was founded.

The Wesley College Trust Board recently announced that the school's boarding hostels will close at the end of Term 4 this year to allow for a full review and redevelopment of the boarding programme. It is a decision the Board describes as both difficult and necessary – a step toward creating a stronger, safer, and more future-focused environment for students.

"Student safety and wellbeing are at the heart of everything we do," says Trust Board Chair Jan Tasker. "This is an opportunity to pause, reset, and rebuild our boarding community so that it truly reflects our Wesleyan commitment to whanaungatanga, compassion, and excellence in education."

A Faith-guided reset

The decision follows ongoing internal reflection and engagement with the Education Review Office, and represents the culmination of several years of progress. During the closure period, two of the existing hostel buildings will undergo extensive renovations. This work will be accompanied by a complete review of hostel culture and staffing, ensuring that when boarding reopens it does so as a model of safety, inclusion, and pastoral care.

"Our goal is not simply to fix what has been, but to build something much better – a modern boarding experience where young people can grow in faith, character, and community," Jan says. "In doing so, we honour the enduring mission of the Methodist Church in education."

Supporting students and families

The College is working closely with students and families to provide tailored solutions for 2026, including day-student transport and assistance for those seeking alternative accommodation nearby. Pastoral care for students and their families remains a central focus throughout this transition.

Even as the boarding houses temporarily close their doors, Wesley's wider school community continues to thrive. Classroom learning, sports, and cultural programmes will operate as normal in 2026, guided by the same commitment to care and Christian character that has defined Wesley College – New Zealand's oldest Methodist educational institution – since 1844.

"The vision guiding this work is one of dignity and faith," Jan says. "Wesley College has always been a place where young people find community and purpose. This renewal ensures that future generations will do the same – in surroundings that are safe, inspiring, and firmly anchored in our Methodist heritage."

Kairyn, a Year 12 boarding student, is looking forward to continuing his schooling at Wesley College next year. The school is working with Kairyn's father to arrange a home stay for Kairyn next year – possibly with his best friend who also attends the school. Year 11 boarding student Katea looks set to move back to her family in Otara and she will catch the Wesley bus to school. When asked about what they most enjoy about being at Wesley, both students rate friendships and teachers highly.

Katea says, "Prayers and worship with your friends takes it to a whole new level of friendships. The teachers too are huge in our lives, they go about and beyond for us. I've been here since Year 9 and the hostel feels like home."

Kairyn adds food. "The food is way better than my old school," he laughs.



A Year On: Life Beyond the Role of MCNZ President

Rev Peter Taylor, MCNZ President 2022 – 2024

I often wondered what went on at the Loss and Grief Centre in Invercargill. Most would expect that their 'customers' would be those recently bereaved, however grief accompanies loss beyond that of loved ones.

Loss and grief form part of many situations common in life – loss of a job through

redundancy, loss of a home through natural disaster, loss of a partner through divorce, loss of possessions through burglary, loss of health through illness or accident, and many more.

One loss (with its accompanying grief) I recently experienced was retirement as President of our Church at our last Conference; it signalled many changes in my life. For instance, as Ex-President I am no longer at many of the meetings at the heart of the Church, no longer invited to preach as President, have no more crises to manage, or seemingly continuous plane rides to endure.

Has this been a relief or have I felt it as a loss of purpose? To some extent both. I knew that the time as President was limited to two years. I valued that time, and I knew it would end. The relief was that someone else was going to be busy instead of myself. The loss of purpose has been that my experience and wisdom gained from being President has not been called upon in our Church; that might not be reality, but it is how it has seemed to me this last year.

Another loss has been retirement from active ministry, and after 40+ years that has been a major change. No more pastoral visits, no more Parish Councils, and I am preaching now less than when I began in the mid-1970s – just five times in 11 months, and all in local Presbyterian churches.

Another loss came in April when, helping to move a Christian library, I hurt my back. This resulted in several physiotherapy sessions, 12 weeks' recovery, many hours of lost sleep and difficulty sitting. I am okay now but because I could not sit to drive in all that time I have got into a habit of walking everywhere, including into the centre of Invercargill (about 30-40 minutes each way).

I spend my time differently from before. In retirement I promised myself I could reread a series of seven lengthy books by Colleen McCullough about the Roman Republic, and rewatch every episode of Stargate SG1 and Stargate Atlantis. Jobs done! I also try to get in a 30 minute (minimum) walk each day. These distractions gave me time to decide how I could best use retirement without rushing into things and instantly regretting them.

So, what are my new activities? I have joined a church men's group, sing in their music group, and am leading an Alpha Marriage Course. I am looking forward to renewing my acting career. Additionally, using my experiences of loss and my skill set gained over four decades as a presbyter, I am a volunteer at the Invercargill Loss and Grief Centre. I now know what goes on there, who works there, and I have met some of their customers, which includes myself.



A Year On: Life Beyond the Role of MCNZ Vice President

TeRito Peyroux-Semu, Vice President 2022 - 2024

Life since completing my term as MCNZ Vice-President has been busier than I expected. Much of this has to do with the wonderful and sometimes demanding realities of everyday life

...

This includes being Mum to a curious six-year-old, a wife, and part of a family where my husband and parents are all deeply active in church and community life. Alongside these roles, I continue to serve in voluntary lay leadership within our Rotuman congregation at Kingsland Trinity, together with fellow lay leaders, Ö'hön ta Jioje Fatiaki and Ö'hön ta Patricia Strickland-Mose.

It is an urban ministry context, full of its own rhythms, celebrations, and challenges, yet it remains one of the most rewarding parts of my week.

In the wider Connexion and community, I have continued to serve on several governance boards and committees, and this year began in a new role as Chair of Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri, one of the newest Connexional Standing Committees. This has been a particularly meaningful opportunity to keep giving back, to contribute some of the insight and experience that the Church so generously invested in me during my time in national leadership, and to see that investment continue to bear fruit through others. It has also been deeply encouraging to work alongside a collective of highly active and engaged people from across different parts and levels of our Hāhi who bring such richness, energy, and wisdom to the life of this committee and its staff team.

Highlights from the Year

1. Seeing Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri take shape.

Knowing that the groundwork for its creation began during the review process that I was privileged to be part of as Vice-President is deeply satisfying, not in a self-referential way, but in the sense of witnessing good discernment and shared vision take root and flourish for the benefit of the whole Connexion.

2. Taking time to rest, learn, and grow.

I have intentionally taken moments to pause and breathe, participating in wānanga that have stretched and rejuvenated me, from learning more about the Doctrine of Discovery with Tina Ngata and Te Tāhekeroa, to beginning my own small urban māra kai journey. These spaces of learning have helped reconnect my faith and practice to the whenua, to justice, and to hope.

3. Continuing to preach and participate.

I have been humbled to be invited to preach and share at various services and events, and equally grateful to simply attend and be inspired by the creativity, prophetic courage, faith and hospitality of so many others in our hāhi. Our Church truly is blessed with gifted, dedicated, caring and visionary people in every corner.

Looking Ahead

This past year has reaffirmed for me that our Church is alive, full of people who carry deep knowledge, compassion, skill, and imagination. What we must continue to do, together, is nurture them well, support them meaningfully, celebrate them wholeheartedly, and ensure that their contributions are valued, safeguarded, and sustained.

It is important to remember that the Spirit's work is not only in the big moments of governance or at Conference, but also in the small, faithful acts of daily ministry, the kind that so many of our people live out quietly and beautifully every week.



Celebrating Blessings & Achievements through the Moemoeā Grant

Rev Kulī Fisi'iahi

Funding from the Budget Task Group Moemoeā Grant has enabled the Northcote Tongan Methodist Congregation to grow in faith, develop their talents, and serve their church and community more effectively.

We are excited to share the wonderful ways our congregation has been blessed and strengthened by the support of this precious funding. One of the highlights has been our youth's joyful praise through music. With the aid of a new keyboard, our young singers have been able to lift their voices in worship, bringing delight to the entire congregation and glorifying God through their talents. Their heartfelt singing has been a blessing for all involved.

The grant has also been used to purchase sports gear, which has brought happiness and confidence to our youth. Their renewed enthusiasm and courage resulted in outstanding achievements at the Auckland Manukau Parish Youth Sport Camp (Tapuaki Youth Sport), where they proudly brought home 12 awards. Their success is a testament to their dedication and also to the support and resources provided by the Moemoeā Grant.

In addition, we received funds to purchase a new Euphonium for our Brass Band, which is also known as a community band. Our band actively participates in community events, fostering spirit and connection beyond our church walls. Notably, they showcased their partnership with the community at the Christmas Parade and ANZAC Day Memorial Services, where their performances brought joy, pride, and a sense of unity to all who attended.

Funding also helped facilitate our Labour Weekend camp, allowing us to gather in fellowship, enjoy spiritual activities, and build stronger bonds within our church. The camp was part of our ongoing campaign against drugs, alcohol, and other social issues affecting our youth and families. We believe that nurturing a faith-based and healthy environment is vital for the growth and future of our young people.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the General Secretary, Rev Tara Tautari, and the Budget Task Group for their generosity and trust in us through the Moemoeā Grant. That support has empowered us to praise and serve God through our musical talents, sporting skills, community involvement, and social initiatives.

The Northcote Tongan Methodist Congregation is grateful for this partnership and we look forward to continued blessings and growth. We pray for the opportunity to serve, uplift, and inspire more lives in the future.



CONTACT DETAILS

I welcome your feedback on content included in this publication.

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He Inoi Mō Te Moana Me Te Huringa Tai

Ngahina Ranui, Taranaki Rohe Liaison Person, and a Hāpai Ō Ki Muri committee member reflects on the bi-annual Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) gathering, held at Sia'atoutai Theological College, Tonga.

Prayer and introduction Rev Keita Hotere

God of Open Moana, and Changing Tides,
For the Wisdom of our Elders and Traditions, we give thanks.
For our new Kupenga woven with purpose. May it move and Adapt to the changes.
Guide us into the depths, and anchor us in your presence with Justice, Peace and Understanding. Amen.

Ngahina invites us into a rich tapestry of Pacific wisdom, where stories and knowledge are deeply interconnected. Her insights from the event highlight the enduring value of these narratives in nurturing community resilience and collective understanding. The kupenga net serves as a powerful metaphor, not only does it capture meaning, it also releases what precious bounty it holds. In this spirit, Ngahina echoes the whakatauākī, Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi where the old net is set aside, and new net cast forward, signalling renewal, continuity of life, and the emergence of new voices.

OBSA 2025: an inspiring and enriching experience

Attending OBSA 2025 at Sia'atoutai was a deeply enriching experience that highlighted the vital intersection of theology, culture, and social justice across Oceania. The kaupapa of Bible, Sia, and Toutai, using metaphors of weaving new nets and fishing, beautifully framed the gathering's focus on reimagining biblical interpretation and community formation in Pacific contexts. This theme reminded me how indigenous knowledge, spiritual practice, and scholarly dialogue can come together to create new ways of understanding scripture and engaging with our communities.

Two presentations stood out to me particularly, as they connected closely to my own context. One critically examined how biblical texts were historically used to justify land dispossession and settler colonialism, with ongoing impacts for Indigenous peoples. This challenged me to reflect on theology's dual role, as a tool both for oppression and for hope, and the importance of unpacking historical narratives to support healing and justice today. The other focused on the role of indigenous language and spirituality in responding to climate change, showing how traditional concepts of guardianship combined with Christian ethics can inspire a more just and sustainable approach to environmental care.

The warmth and hospitality of the Tongan people and the Sia'atoutai community were truly remarkable. Tonga's rich history came alive during a guided tour filled with meaningful korero. The invites to share time in the homes of two families was deeply moving, their open-hearted generosity and kindness was very welcoming and caring. While the tropical weather during our stay in Tonga was a vivid reminder of place, the overall experience was both humbling and eye-opening. I am forever grateful to have been received so warmly as part of this gathering.

Overall, OBSA 2025 reinforced for me that theology is not abstract but deeply connected to real-world issues, land, identity, climate, and justice. It was inspiring to see how faith communities across Oceania are weaving together scripture, culture, and activism to foster transformation.



Labouring with Love and Respect

Rev Dr Susan Thompson

As Tamahere Care Home is undergoing renovations, tradespeople have become familiar figures. I was interested to hear the builders comment on what a friendly place Tamahere is to work in.

Over recent weeks my office has reverberated to the sound of hammers and power drills as the main corridor of the Tamahere care home is upgraded. The builders and painters have been

pulling apart old wall fittings, sanding and painting surfaces and preparing for the installation of a new floor. Despite the disruption, they have been made to feel welcome.

Our staff have many duties and are always busy. However they make the time to chat to our residents, to listen to stories they've probably heard before, to welcome visitors, to help out anyone who is lost or confused and to make extra cups of tea and coffee. They greet everyone by name. No matter how difficult or hectic the day, they stay helpful and positive.

These small daily moments of connection and friendliness are what make a "residential aged care facility" (in my view a horrible phrase) a home: a place where staff and residents become friends and family, a place where - at an especially vulnerable time of their lives - people still feel valued and loved.

I think of our staff when I hear (extremely well-paid) politicians railing against teachers, doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who dare to go on strike. In my experience, people who work in these helping professions are special people. They aren't in it for the money - working with children and older people is never well paid - but because they genuinely care. Their work is often hugely demanding - they sometimes do tasks most of us would prefer never to think about - but they do it with love and respect.

These workers don't deserve to be accused of being "political" when they take a stand for better pay and conditions or when they raise concerns around things like safe staffing levels. Anyone who takes the time to really listen to what they're saying will know that they don't leave their students or patients lightly but out of a deep concern for their and our wellbeing. Strike action is a last resort when employers don't seem to be listening.

This weekend we'll be celebrating Labour Day, commemorating the struggle for an eight-hour working day in New Zealand. As we do, I give thanks for the compassionate hearts and healing hands of all of our staff who care for our residents.



Times Changing for the Presbyterian Church,

Rev Andrew Doubleday, UCANZ Ministry Facilitator

I have just spent four days at Presbyterian Assembly, held in Ōtautahi, Christchurch and beautifully hosted by the people of St Paul's Trinity Pacific.. For the most part, this was a joyous event.

We enjoyed the comprehensiveness of their generous hospitality, their beautiful buildings set apart for the worship of God, and their joyful worship leadership.

Add to this the humble, humorous, gentle and relaxed leadership of Moderator Rt Rev Peter Dunn - who started assembly by reminding us that we are all part of a braided river, that has streams for all (including the rainbow community), and the scene was set for an energised and energising event. I was glad to be part of it.

In terms of business, the high point for me was the response of Assembly to the recommendations of **Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga Workgroup**. I post here the first two recommendations which were agreed without dissent:

1. That General Assembly encourage an intentional commitment to deepen and grow whanaungatanga using the seven specific suggested ways in the report of the Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga Workgroup, guided by the Holy Spirit.
2. That whanaungatanga be put into practice across the Church for shaping strategic direction, participation in structures, and how shared challenges, opportunities, conflicts, and decisions are attended to.

This was huge - potentially a much bigger change and commitment than I believe most of the Commissioners present knew that they were giving themselves to. If followed through, this could radically reshape the Presbyterian Church in the years ahead.

Given that they had just made a commitment to whanaungatanga, one of the ironies was that a proposal to investigate models of consensus decision making (following up a 1998 Assembly decision) was defeated by a narrow minority (PCANZ now requires a 60% majority vote to pass recommendations as decisions).

Culturally the constituency of PCANZ and its Assembly are very Pakeha/Palangi – a very different experience to attending a Methodist Conference. Having said that, the Rev Tamiana Thrupp, moderator of Te Aka Puahou, sat alongside the Assembly moderator throughout the proceedings until Te Aka Puahou left the gathering before the final day. Most of his contributions (usually in the form of prayers) were in te reo Māori – I sensed no resistance.

The Assembly low point was having the UCANZ report, presentation, and recommendation bumped off the agenda due to lack of time. It became part of a very small amount of business passed to the Council of Assembly for consideration. Given that UCANZ represents nearly 30% of Presbyterian Parishes, this was a real disappointment.

Another high point, was a modest Monday evening gathering of CV (Co-operative Venture) peeps and friends at 'Scoundrel' - an appropriately named café/bar around the corner from the Assembly venue. It was our joy, amidst the noise, food, and drink, to induct Rev Andrew Howley as the new UCANZ 'Executive Officer'. I'm continuing half-time as 'Ministry Facilitator', allowing Andrew H to take up the other available half-time. I'm delighted with this new arrangement. We work well together, and Andrew is a competent tech-savvy administrator. This plays to both our strengths. It also means that if you need to talk to UCANZ you only need to remember one name. I'm confident this will well serve UCANZ, CVs, and the Partner Churches into the days ahead.



Church as a Place of Resonance

Rev Uesifili Unasa

When I started in the role of Auckland Synod Superintendent amid the global pandemic, I noticed a high degree of weariness, exhaustion and disillusionment from people I met with.

It was unsurprising that people were consumed by a deep and invasive exhaustion with subtle overtones of disillusionment, given what we were all going through as individuals and communities. Four years on, the weariness has lingered in communities as well as churches.

I think one reason for this weariness stemmed from the fact there was never a clear end to Covid. I can recall saying to my congregation at the time that we needed to address the challenges of the pandemic in a service of recognition. Alongside the service, we would develop a wellbeing programme to help members re-engage with the church. The focus was on the elderly, youth and young parents. The proposed initiative led to tensions and disagreements and the service never eventuated. For many people, the end of the pandemic restrictions quickly shifted from avoiding illness to rebuilding their lives. There was no clear line between the 'during' and the 'after'. Now, we are learning to live with it. Little has been done by way of processing. We have not been able to draw a line under it, or take time deliberately to ponder its impact and understand what it did to us.

During the worst of it, there was a sense the pandemic was providing us with the opportunity to rethink how we lived, the chance to re-view life as is, with a slower pace and a different set of priorities. Most certainly, we didn't take the opportunity as fully as we might have done. People have simply slipped back into their old ways: living life at a pace that feels unsustainable and yet without the ability to put the brakes on.

Other reasons can be attributed to a heightened disenchantment with public institutions and distrust of leaders; the effect of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and elsewhere; the rise in the cost of living; growing anxiety about the environment; the increasing gap between the "haves" and the "have nots"; and the impact of social media, toxic at its worst, creating silos and echo chambers that put more and more strain on the forming of relationships across differences.

For our Methodist Church, I have wondered at times if the weariness and all the other emotions and behaviours are also fuelled by a deep sense of fear and anxiety about the future and survival. We are shrinking in numbers and influence; and we feel it is our responsibility to do something, anything, to avoid this existential threat.

The establishment of the Northern Synod is not only timely but needed.

It does not ignore our predicament. Nor pretend it isn't happening. This step is intentionally doing things differently and in direct contrast to burying our heads in the sand. Critically, we need to face up to it and not imagine that we can somehow control our way out of it by setting unrealistic targets and spending millions of dollars on the old mould of church disconnected to the life and ministry of local congregations and parishes. The catalyst for the establishment of the Northern Synod is the gospel imperative of dwelling a while and listening to the whisper of the Holy Spirit, to hear if there might just be a still small voice beckoning: "Come to me all you that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest". A voice that may help us find meaning in the present; a voice that confirms our primary calling not to be a super successful church in worldly terms but to be intentional in our faithfulness and prayerful in the present moment.

The ordained and lay leaders are our greatest resource, a gift and a blessing from God. All are to be loved, treasured, encouraged and, sometimes, challenged to be who God has called them to be. As for local congregations... against the odds, they are still there. In God's sight they are like the priceless, precious pearl: loved and valued. They are present and they are faithful. While they remain, they will always bear witness to God's love and to the miracle of life in Jesus. In so doing, they offer hope for all of us.

The Northern Synod must discern all of this and be the enabler and provider willing to listen and learn. It must not be the taker or controller of resources the ordained, lay and congregations have or need.

In his book entitled '*Social Acceleration: a new theory of modernity*', the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa paints a picture of the ideologies that have shaped Western democracies and economic development. He articulates how they are predicated on the notion of progress and growth; aggressive competition; dominance and power. And to succeed, Rosa says, businesses and organisations must not only keep pace with societal and economic changes but prove themselves ahead of the game, able to continue growing and progressing, innovating and modernising or destroying competition as necessary.

But in this process of growth and success, human beings are being crushed by the unbearable and unreasonable pressures. It is destroying the planet and impacting our mental health, leading to depression and burnout.

Rosa believes this model is unsustainable, yet it keeps marching onwards. Instead, societies need to develop a model based on what he called resonance - the space to engage with others whose ideas are different, to learn and adapt, to reflect and appreciate, to connect more deeply and allow for the possibility of transformation. In his view, Christianity already has those spaces, or at least at its core, strives to provide them. That is the reason society still so desperately needs the Church. Spaces to pause, slow down, listen to one another and to God.

And for Te Hahi Weteriana, what if God is saying something different to us about learning to be a new kind of community? What if we have things to learn during a season in which we are indeed smaller, more marginal and less influential? Can our small local congregations and churches become places of resonance, where the weary find rest and refreshment?



REFLECTION



The Gifts we Bring to Worship

Viv Whimster

Lay Preachers bring a range of skills and experiences to their ministry. In addition to theological training and congregation involvement, there are many opportunities for training and upskilling on a personal and spiritual level.

We all bring a variety of wisdom and expertise to the paid and volunteer work we do. For Lay Preachers formal training may range from a basic course like *Lead Worship* to being stretched academically through postgraduate studies; our faith journeys will be as different as we are from each other, and our understanding of worship and community life grows through involvement in a congregation. Beyond these are many interesting options for on-going education.

Confidence in public speaking can be developed through belonging to a local amateur dramatic group. Toastmasters offer training for creating and delivering speeches and conducting meetings in an affirming environment. Rotary, Lions and Soroptimists groups, among others, offer opportunities to align social projects and justice advocacy in a secular environment.

Many Lay Preachers find that having computer skills is a huge asset, so gaining training through a Stepping UP programme, SeniorNet or the Open University, for example, offers us increased confidence and competence. Accessing seminars, lectures and sermons through the internet brings us a world of learning and understanding that can continue to engage our minds and stretch our spirits.

For some, writing liturgy and prayers becomes a growing interest: could we join a Writer's Group or book club to extend our understanding of language? This leads us to consider the use of other languages, such as te reo Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian. An increasing number of Pasifika Lay Preachers ask about becoming accredited in English – how many of us, for whom English is a first language, step beyond our comfort zone and use a phrase or sentence, or more, in another language? Are there ways to be more intentional in developing our language skills?

Those who live in larger centres could consider becoming involved with an inter-faith or multi-cultural group, offering opportunities to understand other cultures and to extend hospitality to newcomers who may feel homesick or unwelcome and in need of local friends. For some migrants, a faith community becomes their new extended family.

How well do we understand the way other Christian traditions approach worship? Taking or making the opportunity to experience a service in a different denomination can help us to appreciate why we follow certain practices. Even the way a church is built, or how the sanctuary is named and arranged, can tell us much about another tradition and broaden our theological understanding. By experiencing different approaches to praying and preaching, rituals and aids to worship, we can enrich services from time to time by bringing variety, as we explain what we are introducing and why in a sensitive and respectful way.

Lay Preaching often encompasses ministry beyond the spiritual. Taking a first-aid course could equip us with the confidence to deal with an unexpected medical event in a service – even if it is just to organise the call for an ambulance. Attending a micro-counselling or pastoral training day can deepen our understanding of how to respond to the different situations that members of our congregations bring with them Sunday by Sunday. Many Lay Preachers are asked to lead services in rest homes, giving them the opportunity to connect with residents, staff and sometimes families in a role like that of a chaplain. Understanding the needs of older people in care asks for special skills in our Lay Preachers.

How many of us find ourselves taking a service without any musicians to lead the singing? Can we get back into practice with an instrument we have learnt, or join a choir to become more able to lead singing? Of course, operating a CD player or downloading recorded hymns may be better suited to our skill set!

As well as these varied opportunities for on-going education and up-skilling, Lay Preachers bring with them to worship their training and experience in a variety of trades, professions and daily life. We learn to relate faith to work and work to faith, finding God present among the people we live and work with and bringing our everyday lives to worship.

If you have Lay Preachers in your congregation, how can you affirm the skills they bring and encourage them in their ministry? If you are a Lay Preacher, what plans do you have to extend your skill base and find new ways for the services you lead to continue to be relevant and meaningful? If you think this may be your calling, what abilities do you have already and what might you still need to develop?

The Methodist Church, Te Hāhi Weteriana, is blessed to have many Lay Preachers leading worship in its congregations. We celebrate the ministry they offer and are grateful for their faithfulness to God's call.



NZMWF Convention 2025

Soana Muimuiheata, NZMWF Executive

More than 100 delegates attended the New Zealand Methodist Women's Fellowship (NZMWF) bi-annual Convention, coming together for worship, fellowship, reflection, sharing and reporting on their work over the past 12 months.

We extend a heartfelt thank you to all NZMWF districts for your fellowship, support and commitment to our 2023 -2025 theme:

"Grow in Christ and be a life giver". Philippians 4:19.

Ka whakamana tatou ia Ihu Karaiti, ka ora te tangata. Tupulekina 'ia Kalaisi 'o hoko ko e Fakamo'ui.

Held from 16 – 19 October 2025 at the Jet Park Hotel, Auckland, the Convention included representatives from every district throughout Aotearoa. The event provided a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge women's leadership roles within the Methodist Church of New Zealand.

An inspiring programme

We were blessed with words of wisdom from Guest Speaker, Rev Tara Tautari, General Secretary, MCNZ. Rev Tara challenged us to reflect on our roles and responsibilities, our church, to listen to our children and their questions, and to consider what we do as Methodists in this time and space.

Assoc Prof Emily Colgan, Academic Director Trinity College led us with a Bible study on Sarah and Hagar and the intersecting power dynamics for women in our church contexts.

Rev Siutaisa Tukutau and Siniva Isaia from Methodist Climate Justice Working Group conducted a workshop reminding us that climate change is not just a scientific issue. It is a human issue, a spiritual issue and a faith issue. God has entrusted us with something precious – the power to nurture life. That same power that rocks a child to sleep, that comforts the sick, that feeds the hungry – that same love can heal the Earth.

Director of Safeguarding, Sonia Pope, provided training in conflict resolution, crisis management, and wellbeing practices.

Farewell and welcome

At Convention 2025, we celebrated the induction of the incoming Committee, President Judith Herbert and her team. We also offered thanksgiving for the service of the outgoing Committee, Lesieli Tiulipe Pope and her team. Our Sunday service was held at Lesieli's local church, Pulela'a Methodist Church, where President Te Aroha Rountree participated in the Induction of the NZMWF Incoming President and her team.

We give thanks to God for our fellowship and the leadership of women in Methodist Church of New Zealand.