



Disability and the Church

In July, 22 people - many with lived experience of disability - gathered at Aldersgate, Ōtautahi, for a deep-dive into disability and the church.

The wānanga was promoted as 'a first step in shaping a shared approach to disability inclusion in

our Church, one that begins with people, not policy. Grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it is a space to listen, reflect, and learn from one another's stories, trusting that wisdom emerges in relationship and conversation.'

Over two-days, attendees shared stories, reflection and korero highlighting the mahi ahead to ensure those with disability are seen, heard and engaged in a church that affirms difference.

"Making all doors accessible to church is a metaphor for today," participant Josh Robertson said later.

The What and The Why

In welcoming participants, facilitator Jonathan Tautari advised there was 'no agenda and no expectation of the outcomes from the wānanga ahead'. He encouraged people to, "Trust in the process of the korero ... In speaking about the origins and stories of disability we should not focus on what we expect to achieve."

And so it began; raw, honest, open sharing of lived experience of disability and what prompted each of the 22 people gathered to attend. The stories were personal, diverse and frequently confronting. Some were born with disabilities, others were affected later, from accidents, medical incidents and degenerative conditions.

The hopes and aspirations of the group assembled were as wide ranging as the stories they shared.

Diversity and Disability

The korero highlighted profound differences in understanding and acceptance of disability. Cultural influences, geographical location, age, whanau and theology all impact attitudes. There was intense discussion around the importance of finding a voice and challenging language and behaviour that judges or limits the engagement and involvement of those perceived to be 'less able'.

Many commented on the blessings that come with disability – physical and mental changes that have redirected their life journey's in positive and unexpected ways.

"Life changes but there is always another door," said one wheelchair bound participant.

In discussions that explored understanding, recognising and knowing the origins of what shapes our attitudes to disability, there was hope and there was pain. Korero involved 'unpacking and repacking' those findings, reviewing worship practices and looking at ways of ensuring language and liturgy are inclusive for all, and based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Church has been helpful and harmful.

For some, church has been a safe place, a place of faith, support and love. Others reflected on church experiences that have damaged their wairua, limited their leadership opportunities, ignored their voice and misaligned their wants and expectations.

As korero moved to the importance of Te Tiriti as the covenant establishing our church and our nation, Jonathan discussed partnership principles guiding how we undertake church and mission that includes and embraces the disability perspective.

"Inclusion, welcoming others, involving them in discussions, having accessible buildings, interpreters ... that is just the beginning of the journey.

"We can get advice from our partners but who has their hands on the levers - the power - to make small and significant changes in how we operate church?

"How do we share power with those who have a disability and how do we do that in a way that transforms them and those around them?

"The Treaty is for all of us. It's a covenant. It's dynamic. We haven't kept the promise of inclusion and power sharing with our disabled community. Everyone has a right to participate in the conversation. We need to understand the barriers and how to break them down"

Participants reflected on inclusion, partnership and transformation for church in Aotearoa. There is no 'one size fits all' - many strands require weaving together to deliver a Treaty-based approach to ensuring church is welcoming and inclusive to everyone.

As the discussions closed, and participants prepared to leave Aldersgate for kai, korero and fellowship at another venue, it was abundantly evident that inclusion extends well beyond building design and well-meaning rhetoric.

Day one of the church and disability wānanga provided a great foundation for prophetic and transformational change in MCNZ to ensure that 'every person is seen, heard and empowered to lead'.



Discerning Bible & Behaviour with a Disability Lens

Mataiva Robertson captured the essence of Day two. The day began with reflection on Day one. It had been a very emotional, powerful and inspirational day of sharing stories, experiences and insights. The safe space created allowed all present to be vulnerable in sharing.

We were blessed by our sign language interpreters who taught us how to sing "Te Aroha" with sign language, much to the delight of our hearing advocate, Johanna Brens and her beautiful hearing dog, Mako.

A contextual bible study led by Rev Tara Tautari regarding the story of Moses' calling from God (and Moses' reluctance due to his perceived physical weaknesses) generated lots of discussion

amongst the group who were learning to examine biblical text with a "disability" lens.

Throughout the wānanga, improving physical accessibility within buildings was merely the tip of the iceberg. Reviewing theological application, how we interact and engage with people regardless of their abilities/disabilities (both seen and unseen), the language we use within the church environment and within our own homes were some of the other matters discussed that indicate clearly that there is much work to be done by us all.

All present were in strong agreement that to truly be a more inclusive church we need to continue to progress this kaupapa. An annual gathering is now in the planning pipeline. Future online meetings are planned so that this dialogue can continue.



Singing Our Shared Future Wesleyan Identity in a Spirit-Led Movement (part 2/2)

Rev. Peter Norman, Vice President, Te Hāhi
Weteriana o Aotearoa

At each of the ecumenical and Methodist whanau gatherings I mentioned in my July reflection, I sensed something rising - a hunger, a readiness, a willingness to work together. Not despite our differences, but because of them.

Someone said to me, "What sets Christianity apart - what makes it unique - is the singing. And that's especially true for Methodists." They were right.

Charles Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns. For Methodists, singing has never just been tradition - it's how we've expressed our faith, carried our stories, and joined our voices across time and difference. Even as our theology deepens and diversifies, these hymns still speak. They give shape to our longings, hold space for our questions, and call us into hope together. At those gatherings, song wasn't performance. It was breath prayer. A shared heartbeat. A *wairua* rhythm that held us - mismatched mugs and all - in harmony.

Living the Gospel: Real Practices for Real People

This shared worship must spill into shared action:

- Intercultural housing projects
- Faith-led climate adaptation hubs
- Bicultural and interfaith peacebuilding
- Community mental health and *kai* security networks
- Shared governance models built on *mana ōrite* (equal authority)

Weaving through it all is the emerging vision of spiritual villages — local, grounded ecosystems where prayer, learning, service, and celebration happen in daily rhythm. Intergenerational. Intercultural. Infused with *wairua*.

Places where Methodism meets *wāhi tūhono* — the connecting spaces of everyday life: the market, the kitchen table, and the song. And in *te ao Māori* — where it finds resonance in the *hui*, the *hākari*, and the *noho*: places of gathering, feasting, learning, and staying connected in *wairua* and *whanaungatanga*. In Pacific contexts, these sacred spaces are found in the *fale*, the *bure*, and in circles of *talanoa* and *kōrero* — where stories are shared, wisdom flows, and the *vā* is honoured: the sacred relational space between people, the land, ancestors, and Spirit. The *vā* is not empty - it is alive. Dynamic. A space where grace breathes and dignity is held.

The Spirit Blows Where She Will

It felt like something deeper was being stirred - a call not just to gather, but to live the gospel anew in this time of change. The Spirit is already moving across Aotearoa- across generations, across traditions, across the cracks and currents of this changing world. We don't need to invent the wind. We just need to raise our sails. So let us:

- Compost what no longer gives life.
- Uplift every voice, every people.
- Honour difference as divine design.
- Invest in love that looks like action.

This isn't just change. It is gospel. It is good news. It is our way of walking humbly with God, loving mercy, and doing justice - together.



Church Leaders' Meet with the Prime Minister Seeking Justice, Upholding Hope, Walking Together in Aotearoa.

Te Aroha Rountree, President Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa.

In July, I was honoured to join Church leaders from across Aotearoa for a pivotal meeting with Prime Minister, Christopher Luxon, and several senior Ministers, including Tama Potaka, Minister for Māori Development.

Early in the year, Heads of Churches gathered to begin preparations for an annual hui with the Prime Minister. Our foundations as a collective are deeply embedded in a shared understanding of the sacredness of human life and the wellbeing of all people, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable within our society. These values are not abstract ideals—they are the living heartbeat of our collective conscience and ethical vision. They draw from the wisdom of our spiritual and cultural traditions and inspire a vision for a just, compassionate, and sustainable future.

As a representative of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, I was both honoured and compelled to participate in the meeting held 22 July. This was not simply a political encounter, but a prophetic opportunity to speak truth, offer hope, and stand alongside the people of this land—particularly those whose voices are too often marginalised.

Key Concerns Raised: Faith in Action for the Common Good

During the meeting, the following pressing issues were presented as being at the heart of our Church's pastoral mission and theological conviction:

Tangata - Poverty and Inequality

The growing divide between rich and poor in Aotearoa is not only an economic issue—it is a moral crisis. We urged the Government to prioritise policies that uplift our most vulnerable whānau, including children living in poverty, low-income workers, and those struggling to access affordable housing. We advocated for fair wages, robust social support systems, and the protection of essential public services. The wellbeing of people – *tangata* - must be at the heart of our economic and social systems. We called on the Government to ensure economic growth serves all, not just a privileged few. This means creating policies that reduce inequality, ensure access to housing, healthcare, and education, and enable everyone to live with dignity and opportunity. A just society is one where every person has a place, where poverty is not tolerated, and where public good outweighs private profit.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi– Honouring a sacred covenant

With Minister Tama Potaka present, we reaffirmed our deep commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a sacred covenant. We challenged any regression in co-governance efforts or Māori-led initiatives, reminding our leaders that justice for tangata whenua is not a political concession but a spiritual imperative. The Methodist Church continues to support rangatiratanga and the restoration of Mana Motuhake for Māori communities.

Climate Justice and Kaitiakitanga of Creation

In keeping with our belief that creation is a divine gift, we raised urgent concerns about climate action. We called for bold leadership to reduce emissions, protect biodiversity, and ensure a just transition for workers and communities affected by environmental policy shifts. We reminded the Government that the moral cost of inaction is borne most heavily by the poor and by future generations.



AROUND THE CONNEXION

Our call for *kaitiakitanga* - environmental guardianship - is rooted in both spiritual responsibility and indigenous wisdom. We urge bold leadership that prioritises climate justice, effective mitigation strategies, and adaptation policies that protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems. The taiao (natural world) is not a resource to exploit but a sacred trust to nurture. A flourishing earth is essential for a flourishing people.

A Call to Shared Responsibility and Gospel-Centred Hope

As Methodist people, we are not seeking power for ourselves, but seeking justice in Christ's name. Our engagement with political leaders is shaped by Micah 6:8 – to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We left the meeting encouraged by some of the willingness to listen, but also deeply aware that words must translate into action.

We commit to continued prayer, advocacy, and practical service - walking alongside our communities and calling our leaders to moral courage. Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9). This perspective challenges us to bring our ethical convictions into the contemporary world, with all its complexity.

In a time marked by social inequality, global unrest, technological upheaval, and environmental crises, the enduring principles of love, justice, and humility remain both relevant and revolutionary. Jesus' commandment in the Gospel of Luke - "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and love your neighbour as yourself*" (Luke 10:27) - reminds us that authentic spirituality is never divorced from practical concern for others. To love our neighbour as ourselves is to treat every person with dignity, to ensure no one is left behind, and to create structures that serve the common good.

Our hope is for a nation that walks gently yet boldly in the direction of love and justice, where the sacredness of every life and the health of our shared world are upheld as foundational values. Let us act justly. Let us love mercy. Let us walk humbly—together.



AROUND THE CONNEXION



Community is Key for St Andrew's by the Sea

Dorothy Preece, St Andrew's worship team leader.

St Andrew's by the Sea Community Church, Whitianga is the sole church in the Mercury Bay Co-operating Parish. Friendship is their first outreach. Beyond Sunday services, the parish hosts a hive of community activity and fellowship opportunities.

The community church, built in 1898, stands proud on Whitianga's main street. In 2002 we added a new hall to accommodate community groups. As a church fellowship we plan a number of community events throughout the year; pink ribbon dinners, history teas, Volunteers' Sunday, and the annual 'Made by Hand' craft expo in mid-July. Craft groups and individuals are invited to take a table, display their crafts and demonstrate their skills. This year displays included spinning wheels and a fascinating sock-making machine; patchwork quilts and knitted blankets adorned the church, and visitors were encouraged to take time to examine the church building – itself a work of craftsmanship.



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Aotearoa Children's Music Awards I Nga Manu Tīrairaka

At the annual Aotearoa Children's Music awards ceremony in Tāmaki Makaurau on 29 June, three children's music creators from Ōtautahi with a connection to MCNZ scooped up several awards.

Loopy Tunes, a Christchurch-based music duo of siblings Siu Williams-Lemi and Leah Williams-Partington dominated the awards event with three

category wins, including the coveted Tūi for Recorded Music NZ Te Manu Taki Kerekahu o te Tau | Best Children's Music Artist. Loopy Tunes evolved from a pre-school music group the sisters were running at Beckenham Methodist Church. Between 2010 and 2020, Siu was the MCNZ Children and Youth Ministries Co-Ordinator for the Central South Island.

Michal Bush, (daughter-in-law of former MCNZ General Secretary, Rev David Bush) who performs under the name [Music with Michal](#) won the APRA Best Children's Song – Primary | He Pī Ka Rere. (*The September edition of Touchstone will include an article on Michal and her successful music career.*)

Pasifika Heritage and Church Informs Loopy Tunes Mahi and Kaupapa

For sisters Leah (45) and Siu (41), music was always in their DNA. Mastering playing the piano and recorder progressed to flute for Leah and clarinet, saxophone and guitar for Siu. Their older brother plays the trumpet and their sister plays the violin. Singing was always a much-cherished family affair. "We grew up in the Tongan Church where singing and harmonies were all around us."

Their rich cultural heritage - Tongan mother and Māori / Chinese father - influenced their upbringing, language and creative talents. They grew up speaking Tongan at home and, although they admit, "We lost it when we started school," they can understand the language and write many of their songs in Tongan.

Embracing Te Ao Māori and Pasifika

Their kaupapa is to normalise the use of Māori and Pacific languages in everyday life through music. They have embraced the opportunity to learn te reo Māori as adults, and along with other members of their whanau, participate in language wānanga and noho marae. As well as juggling the demands of preparing for their outreach music classes, visiting preschools, running workshops for educators, and creating episodes for their YouTube series, they each parent three children with busy lives of their own. It is a hectic schedule, but the sisters agree that creating catchy tunes for small people is a wonderful way to share their God-given talents.

Scheduling Loopy Tunes work during term time and ring-fencing school holidays for whānau, ensures a balance between work and family life. Loopy Tunes is a family affair and both Leah and Siu are grateful for the unconditional support of their husbands who have contributed in many other ways to their success. "They were both Mermen in our nominated music video animation," Leah says laughing. "They are musical, feed us and make sure we stay sane."

The duo has won numerous awards and industry accolades although winning the top prize at the recent Aotearoa Children's Awards is a first for the siblings who released their first recordings for children in 2019. Leah says, "You can never have too much children's music," and Siu affirms she has "loads of sound bites on my phone." That information, combined with the excitement of winning their latest award, suggests Loopy Tunes will be making their very special brand of music for a long time to come.



Global Meeting a Showcase for the Beauty of God's Diversity in Creation

Wliame Toduadua

Following a rigorous selection process, I was honoured to be one of 25 youth selected - from 200 global applicants - to participate in the WCC Stewards' Programme in Johannesburg in June.

I hail from the village of Ketei on the island of Totoya in the province of Lau, Fiji, with

maternal links to the village of Keiteira on the island of Moala. I was born and raised in Lautoka and migrated with my family to Hamilton, New Zealand, in 2009. Since then, I have completed my education in Aotearoa, most recently finishing a Master of Health, Sport, and Human Performance and a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology at the University of Waikato, where I also work part-time supporting students and staff.

Faith has been a constant anchor in my life. I have been actively involved in the Methodist Church since childhood - through Sunday school, youth groups, and choir. Today, I serve at the Hamilton East Methodist Parish in both the English and Fijian congregations. I have had the privilege of serving as the Hamilton Fijian Methodist Youth Leader for five years, and I currently serve as a Sunday school teacher in our parish's English-speaking congregation as well as the Youth Convenor for the Waikato Waiariki Synod. I was deeply honoured to be selected as one of 25 young people from across the world to attend the World Council of Churches (WCC) Stewards' Programme in Johannesburg, South Africa. Over 200 applicants vied for a place, and following a rigorous process - including a written application and interview - I was selected to represent our region in this global gathering of faith and action. While I had previously travelled to Australia, this was my first time venturing so far from home.

Our programme began on 16 June with an opening worship and welcome. The days that followed were rich with daily devotions, theological reflections, and deep discussions on ecumenism, justice, and the church's prophetic role in society. A standout moment for me was learning about the Kairos Document and the church's resistance to apartheid. It was a stirring reminder of faith's power to confront injustice.

From 18 to 24 June, we supported the WCC Central Committee sessions in various capacities, including logistics, worship, and communications. I was part of the spiritual life team, helping to prepare and lead worship services each day. Morning, midday, and evening prayers - led by South African churches - framed our daily rhythm, offering sacred moments of unity and reflection.

Each day at the Central Committee was full—from early morning responsibilities to evening Vespers. The week included pilgrimage visits highlighting issues of climate and gender justice, committee decision-making, and opportunities for cultural exchange. What moved me most was the genuine fellowship among stewards, church leaders, and delegates from around the world. Despite our different backgrounds, languages, and experiences, we were bound together by shared faith, mutual respect, and a deep commitment to the work of justice and reconciliation. Witnessing people of different denominations and abilities fully participating in the life of the church reminded me of the beauty of God's diversity in creation. It reaffirmed that every individual brings something sacred to the table.

This experience was a profound journey of learning, service, and spiritual growth. I return home with a renewed sense of purpose, a broader understanding of the ecumenical movement, and a deeper appreciation for the global body of Christ. I give all glory to God for this opportunity and for the community of faith that nurtures and supports me.



Baptising Zionist Barbarism

Rev Dr Nasili Vaka'uta, Principal Trinity Theological College

There are moments in history when the silence of religious institutions becomes complicit in violence. Today, we are witnessing one such moment.

As bombs fall on Gaza, as children are buried in rubble, and as families grieve without justice, many churches remain disturbingly quiet. And worse; some baptise this barbarism with the language of divine promise.

The actions of the Israeli state in Palestine—

whether in Gaza, the West Bank, or East Jerusalem—are not acts of divine destiny. They are acts of political violence. To wrap this brutality in scripture is not just poor theology; it is blasphemy.

Zionism, as a political ideology, emerged in the late 19th century. Its founders were largely secular nationalists, not devout theologians. Yet in recent decades, particularly among evangelical Christians, Zionism has been baptised. A settler-colonial ideology has been anointed with biblical legitimacy. In the name of fulfilling "God's promise," people have been dispossessed, displaced, and destroyed.

This is not faith. This is fascism draped in religious garb.

To "stand with Israel" today - uncritically, without acknowledging the decades of occupation, the apartheid-like structures, the mass displacements and repeated massacres - is not an act of Christian solidarity. It is an abandonment of Christ's ethic of justice, compassion, and peace. The gospel does not excuse ethnic cleansing. It confronts empire. It liberates the oppressed. Palestinian Christians, some of the oldest followers of Jesus in the world, cry out, but Western churches do not listen. The Jesus they preach is not the one born under Roman occupation in Bethlehem. It is a fabricated messiah who blesses bombs, sanctions sieges, and endorses occupation. This false Christ serves the powerful, not the poor.

Why have so many churches baptised this violence?

Partly, it is the result of bad theology. Reading the Hebrew Bible as a real estate contract rather than a call to ethical responsibility is a misreading. The land was never a blank cheque. It was conditional, covenantal, always tied to justice and care for the stranger. The prophets thundered not about conquest but about corruption.

But more than theology, it is about political cowardice. To speak out for Palestine is to risk being labelled anti-Semitic, unpatriotic, or dangerous. Yet there is nothing anti-Semitic about condemning state violence. There is nothing anti-Jewish about opposing apartheid. In fact, many Jews around the world are leading this resistance—including in Israel itself. It is not Judaism we must challenge, but the weaponising of religion to justify domination.

As Christians - especially in the Pacific - we must ask: how did we become so colonised in our own thinking that we now defend another people's colonisation? Have we so thoroughly internalised imperial Christianity that we mistake conquest for calling?

It is time to decolonise our theology. It is time to say with clarity: Zionist barbarism is not of God. And it is time to stand with the crucified, not the crucifiers.



To Be Christian is to be Sustained by the Invisibility of Hope

Rev Uesifili Unasa

Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? St Paul Romans 8:24

The Christian hope at the heart of Paul's epistle is not optimism, nor is this hope merely wishful thinking and an aversion to unpleasant facts. St Paul is not interested in some cheap therapeutic notion of mind over matter.

For St Paul, hope is the result, the consequence, the product, if you will, of an incontestable fact. That fact is that we live at the level of the spirit and not merely of the flesh. For sure, we exist at the level of the flesh and in the realm of the material but a life, as opposed to merely living, is lived by the Christian at the level of the spirit. That is what it means to take on a life in the spirit of Christianity, and it is hard because it means that we cannot be seduced by the appearances of reality that would overwhelm us by their delights and pleasures, and we are not to be intimidated by the terrors and troubles of this life. You and I are seduced and intimidated every day in every way.

Things dominate the world, the age, and the church. The Christian hope of which St Paul speaks tells us not to be seduced into a false sense of security by the possession and ownership of things.

By this same hope, we must not be intimidated by the troubles of our life. I went to a birthday party for a newborn cousin years ago where she was presented with a blanket with the words "Welcome, little stranger, to this world of care." Now, I would not give this to a child today. Children growing up in today's world will find that this world is filled with the means to cut us down to size and to intimidate and inhibit us at every turn. When we discover that war is the rule and peace the exception, that virtue is in short supply and intelligence even more so. The weather forecasters have it right when they say that "there may be sunspots," when with the same climate configuration our weather people can also say that "there may be showers".

None of this is news, none of this is new, and this dilemma is not new: there has always been enough mendacity and mediocrity to go around. This is the substance of the material world: this is what St Paul means by the word, "flesh".

The spirit, however, is another matter, another realm not opposite to "reality" as we define it. In fact, it is the only reality that there really is. In a world of facts that are fictions and fictions that resemble facts, Christians live by an invisible reality that overcomes seduction and intimidation. To live in such a world as this as a Christian is to affirm that this world alone cannot and must not define by itself who we are. If we let the world define us, we are dead. But if we let the spirit define us, we have a life that even death itself cannot intimidate or extinguish.

To live in a visible world by the invisible reality of hope is the most revolutionary and life-giving existence possible. We do not have to die to live such a life. This is what St Paul is saying in the epistle text. G.K Chesterton puts it this way, "Hope means expectancy when things are hopeless." Thus, when things are always and ultimately hopeless, hope is all that the Christian has, and all that the Christian requires.

Christians are sustained by the invisible reality of hope, and for that we thank God.



Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga Conference in Ha'apai 2025

Te Aroha Rountree, President Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa.

I recently travelled across the Pacific to Ha'apai, where congregations of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga gathered from 22 to 30 June 2025 for their 101st national conference in Pangai.

This Conference took place in a year of profound spiritual significance as Tonga prepared to mark the golden jubilee of the Mystery Cross - an event whose meaning reverberates through our wider Methodist family in Oceania. In the spirit of whanaungatanga, I acknowledge and greet the President of the Free Wesleyan Church, the Rt. Hon. Rev. Dr Tevita Koloa'ia Havea. I respectfully greet the royal household of King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u, and the thousands of Tongans who assembled in loyal devotion. Our shared Wesleyan roots, shaped through the ministrations dating back to 1822,

bind our peoples across islands and seas.

Half a century ago, early on the morning of 26 October 1975, Rev. Kalavite 'Uhila witnessed a bright cross-shaped light embedded in the grounds of the Free Wesleyan Church compound at Pangai. After the dawn service, senior clergy and congregants confirmed the remarkably large shape - about 10.2 m by 7.1 m - later preserved in cement, with the grass around it turning a deep yellow-green.

Rev Dr Mohenoa Puloka described it as "the only known and confirmed imprimatur cross delivered by angelic hosts from heaven". The phenomenon was rapidly reported to the late President Rev Dr Sione 'Amanaki Havea, who informed His Majesty King Taufa'āhau Tupou IV. The king visited the site and recalled it appeared upon the same ground where King Taufa'āhau I knelt for baptism in 1831 - a reaffirmation of his 1839 covenant: "God and Tonga are my heritage." The event is now approved for national remembrance: Tonga has set aside Monday 27 October 2025 as a one-off public holiday to observe the 50th anniversary.

The Ha'apai Conference in June wove worship, royal addresses, theological reflection, and youth pilgrimage. Methodists travelled to the birthplace of King George Tupou I and prayed at sites resonant with church history and national identity. The renewal in youth presence affirms the vision of Sione 'Amanaki Havea and others who fostered Pacific contextual theology - coconut theology - grounded in soil, ocean, genealogies and God's promise. The Mystery Cross is not just a historical miracle; it is a covenant-sign, inviting continued unity across peoples of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

It recalls Queen Salote's unifying leadership in 1924, merging the Free Church and Wesleyan Church of Tonga; healing the schism and creating the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga as the largest denomination in the land. That story of reconciliation invites us as Māori to consider how unity and context-rooted identity can cohere in our own church life. Looking forward, I envision deeper mutual relationships - Methodist youth exchanges, theological dialogue between Te Hāhi Weteriana and FWC seminarians at Sia'atoutai Theological College, and perhaps shared liturgies that reflect Māori and Tongan contextual theologies.

The 50th anniversary of the Mystery Cross deserves celebration, reflection and thanksgiving across Methodist communities. As President of the Methodist Church of New Zealand with Māori whakapono in my heart, I stand in solidarity with the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. We hold dear the tohu that affirms covenant, the tohu that knits people to whenua, the tohu that calls us into unity across Pacific traditions.



A Call to Peace

Gillian Southey

This month New Zealand churches mark Peace Sunday, the closest Sunday to Hiroshima Day, August 6. Last month people marked the fortieth anniversary of the sinking of The Rainbow Warrior. Both events are a poignant reminder of the immense impact of nuclear weapons and warfare and the ongoing need for prayer and action for peace.

On July 7, 1985 the Rainbow Warrior sailed into Auckland Harbour, having successfully transferred 320 people from nuclear contaminated Rongelap Atoll after the US government [failed](#) to help. Three days later, agents of the French Government planted two explosives, killing photographer Portuguese born Fernando Pereira and sinking Greenpeace's flagship vessel. That event remains a potent peace symbol for all who advocate for a nuclear free and independent Pacific.

Self-determination for the Pacific

Greenpeace had planned for the ship to lead a flotilla to protest French nuclear testing in the Pacific. France undertook 193 tests on Moruroa and Fangataufa Atolls, ending in 1996. Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) has also been affected by nuclear contamination. Etaretia Porotetani Maohi or Maohi Protestant Church has been a leader in the campaign for justice. The French government has been slow to recognise and compensate people harmed by the testing. For many years New Zealanders campaigned against visiting nuclear warships and testing in the Pacific. In 1987, parliament passed the NZ Nuclear Free Zone Disarmament & Arms Control Act. NZ continues to actively work for disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons in international arenas.

First Nuclear Weapons

This year marks 80 years since United States forces dropped the first atomic bombs on the Japanese people. Dropping the bomb called "Little Boy" left 100,000-180,000 people dead in Hiroshima. Three days later, the larger "Fat Boy" bomb killed 50,000-100,000 more people in Nagasaki.

Bedi Rescure of the Pacific Conference of Churches visited Hiroshima in 2023. She writes,

"After my visit to Hiroshima, it took me many days to process all of the horrors I had seen. The consequences of nuclear weapons are so terrifying and lasting that I cannot understand why any country would ever want to inflict such evil on innocent men, women and children. There was so much suffering. Despite their past, the people of Hiroshima were always full of optimism and hope. I came to learn that personal faith was a vital source of strength and resilience for Japanese peace advocates. They inspired me with their own faith to turn to God for moments of silence, prayers and reflection so that I could restore my own peace." Survivors have shared their stories and have campaigned to stop the production of nuclear weapons throughout the world. One of the most famous is 12 year old Sadako who made origami peace cranes.

Peace Sunday

On Peace Sunday, churches are encouraged to pray and act for peace, in the face of very real war. The UN has proved unable to protect civilians in the Congo Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. Governments are rapidly increasing defence budgets. New Zealand's government has committed to spend more than \$9 billion on defence over the next four years.

"This moment calls the global Christian community - and all people of faith and goodwill - to recognise the things that make for peace. It is a time not only of warning but of opportunity: a Kairos for bold, collective action in service of God's justice and peace." From WCC Statement on threats to Peace and Security; a Kairos Moment for Just Peace.



The Use and Abuse of Power

Rev Donald Phillipps

The Kitchingman family of Taranaki gave three of its sons to the Methodist ministry. The eldest of these, Owen Arthur (1925 – 1993) entered ministry 70 years ago.

Owen spent ten years in Wellington and Te Kuiti and then he felt a call to mission, in this country. When the Southland Council of Churches advertised for a full-time chaplain to the new Manapouri Power Project, he offered and was appointed. Owen was a man of strong convictions and a 'champion' of working people. After he finished there, he became director of a pilot industrial scheme in Christchurch. Though he left full-time ministry he never lost his missionary vision and served both community and Church until his retirement.

Power, as a commodity, is essential to civilized life. New Zealand has been fortunate that its need for power has been largely satisfied through hydroelectric generation – and the need for the massive damming of rivers. This situation is changing as it is increasingly

recognised that the creation of new power sites makes unsustainable demands on the physical structure of Aotearoa. And the financial costs, may be too much for the user – people like us – to bear. Power, as a commodity, in other continents and countries, is provided in ways that quite definitely, in the medium-term, pollute the atmosphere, and as in the case of the Chernobyl nuclear power reactor, endanger physical existence for decades.

But it is not on power as commodity that this contribution focuses. A much more immediate threat hangs over the whole of the world in the actions of men (this word is deliberately used) who desire power in the name of their countries (they say) but in reality express their lust for personal gain. It is there in smaller lands where historical feuds are still being worked out among tribal or religious groupings. It is there in both smaller and larger lands where nuclear weaponry threatens, and dictatorship is a reality.

In the NT two words are used to express the nature and basis of leadership:

δύναμις - *dunamis*, and ἐξουσία - *exousia*. The former word is the origin of words in common use – dynamo and dynamic, for example. The second word is the one that matters. Its origin is in the sense of leadership that arises out of the very person of the leader. There is that wonderful story of Jesus, approached by a Roman centurion, asking him for help in the healing of a servant girl. He didn't expect Jesus to do this in person, as it were – he recognised that Jesus was a "man under authority" who would only have to say the word and it would be done. That's the mind of a dutiful soldier, but it is also, in this case, the recognition by a soldier that Jesus did what he did because God was in him.

The leader who rules by threat of punishment – who can rule only if the individual is not respected – is far too often these days leading the world towards disaster. There is the need for leadership that is based on mutual respect. The word in *te reo* that has as special validity in our daily vocabulary is '*mana*'.

We engage this year in local government elections. Next year we will be engaged in the election of a new national government. What are we going to look for in the people who offer themselves as candidates? It has to be more than the wish to exercise power. More than ever, we need government with *mana* based on humane ideals, and on both wisdom and experience. With that foundation Aotearoa/New Zealand will have *mana*, and will stand up for those values on the international stage.