



## Te Hinota Weteriana o Te Waipounamu

*Rev Dale Peach*

In January 2024, the newly formed South Island Methodist Synod, Te Hinota Weteriana o Te Waipounamu, officially met for first time.

This new synod combined the three geographical Methodist synods in Te Waipounamu: Nelson Marlborough West Coast, Central South Island and Otago Southland. It was significant for the church.

### Long Term Planning

This process began in 2018 when Rev Kathryn Walters, the then-Superintendent for the Central South Island (CSI) Synod, also became the Superintendent for the Nelson Marlborough West Coast (NMW) Synod. This started the intentional exploration of the possibility of the two synods combining, and from 2020 the CSI and NMW Synods started working on possible amalgamation proposals. During this time one NMW Synod meeting each year was held in Christchurch, where much of the meeting was shared with the CSI Synod, but the two synods met separately to conduct their own business as needed. These combined meetings were often for the annual synod, but it proved challenging at times travelling in August across an island that has a great big mountain range down its middle. However, this did give the opportunity for the members of each synod to get to know each other.



As amalgamation was discussed, money and identity were recognised as the major concerns that had to be worked through. For example, the NMW Synod is based on relationships. Meeting three times a year, from a Friday afternoon to lunch after the Sunday service, enabled strong relationships to be maintained, and enabled each congregation to organise and host the

event every second year. Amalgamation discussions required careful consideration about how this style of meeting could continue and be nurtured.

In late 2021, the Otago Southland (OS) Synod also entered into the amalgamation discussions as they recognised they were struggling to fully function as a synod. This only required a slight redrafting of the amalgamation proposal. At the annual synod meetings in 2022, the final version of the proposal to amalgamate was agreed by all three synods. The amalgamation proposal document recognised the differences between the synods and proposed that existing synods would become regions, identifying a structure and meeting schedule.

### Consultation and Consent

Towards the end of 2022, this amalgamation proposal was circulated to every parish in the three synods. According to the MCNZ Law Book (Section 4 2.2.3), for synods to combine, full consultation with all parishes/congregations concerned is needed, and amalgamation would normally not happen without the consent of a majority of the parish councils. Therefore, every parish was asked to indicate if they supported this amalgamation, and a non-reply was taken as consent. Only two of the 34 parishes came back with questions, and both supported the move once their concerns were answered.

Therefore, when all three South Island geographical synods met in Christchurch in March 2023 to make the final decision, they knew there was support from parishes for this amalgamation and the vote revealed that unanimous support. This was followed by a vote for the superintendent of the new synod, when Rev Dale Peach was selected as the incoming Synod Superintendent.



Prior to the votes being taken, each synod spent time introducing every congregation in their synod. People valued the opportunity to gain a greater appreciation of the variety of Christian communities in Te Waipounamu. Time was also given to discussing any questions and concerns people had about the amalgamation. The final exercise undertaken was to discuss what special aspects of each synod the combined synod wanted to continue. Out of this came the recognition that OS had a strong tradition of schools of theology, and immediately an enthusiastic group gathered to talk about organising a school of theology. This generated a lot of positive energy, and resulted in the first South Island Synod school of theology, now known as Kete Aroha o Waipounamu, being held following the inaugural Synod meeting.

In the latter part of 2023, Dale established the new synod executive as outlined in the amalgamation document. The incoming executive decided the first meeting of the new synod would be held at the end of January 2024, so that it could include the induction of the new Synod Superintendent. On Saturday 27 January 2024, the inaugural meeting of the new South Island Synod, Te Hinota Weteriana o Te Waipounamu, was held in the morning, followed by the induction service that afternoon.

Much of the time during the morning meeting focused on synod members furthering their connections with each other. The meeting also discussed the synod executive's suggestion that the in-person meeting each year be held in a different location. This idea was rejected because of the time and cost of travel. The majority of synod members come from the Canterbury region. It made little sense to move the bulk of the synod to another location. Therefore, the decision was made that all in-person synod meetings will be held in Christchurch.

### **New Means for Meeting**

During 2024, the proposed pattern of synod meetings was actioned. Covid-19 taught us all a lot about the ability to meet over Zoom. Fortunately, there are at least two churches in Christchurch with the technology to enable hybrid synod meetings. Those living in Canterbury who want to gather in person can do so, and the rest of the synod members Zoom into that same meeting space where the use of a camera and a big screen enables all participants to see each other. While there is still room for improvement, the hybrid synod meetings have worked well. So too have the regional synod meetings, providing the original synods with the ability to continue their traditional ways of meeting.

The process of amalgamating the three South Island geographical synods revealed the importance of building relationships. This is not a process that can be rushed, and it must be intentional. There must be a commitment to meet, share and get to know each other. Care must be taken when considering the amalgamation of bank accounts as synods often have funds that are required to be spent in their region only. Mechanisms for this to continue need to be established.

Another learning from this process is that it is important that the character of each synod is not lost in any amalgamation. Ways must be established so that each region of a new combined synod is able to keep its identity, while still having the advantage of being part of a larger synod. The end result must be life-giving.

The role of the Synod Superintendent and the structure of a large synod needs to be carefully thought through. It was identified that parishes seeing and knowing the Synod Superintendent helps to cement the connection between parishes and the synod. This has meant extensive travel for the Synod Superintendent, which is not cheap and only possible because the position is full-time.

So far, things are going well for Te Hinota Weteriana o Te Waipounamu. In the March synod meeting this year, the focus will be on further developing the synod strategic plan, especially exploring ways for parishes in the synod to support each other. The amalgamation of synods is only the start of lots of other work and opportunities.



## PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT



### **A Message of Solidarity from the MCNZ.**

*Te Aroha Rountree, MCNZ President*

The Methodist Church of New Zealand stands in unwavering solidarity with our LGBTQ+ whānau, in response to recent attacks from Destiny Church and others who seek to harm and marginalise. We acknowledge the deep pain, frustration, and exhaustion of those who must constantly defend their own existence. Faith-based discrimination has caused profound harm, and we grieve the misuse of Christian language and symbols to spread exclusion and division. Without hesitation, we affirm that all people are made in the image of God and are inherently worthy of dignity, love, and belonging.

As Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, our commitment to bicultural partnership, justice, and grace calls us to be a Church that truly welcomes and affirms all people. Silence is not an option when our whānau are under attack. We call on churches, faith communities, and people of goodwill to reject hate and stand openly in support of LGBTQ+ communities.

We are grateful for the leadership of those within our Church and across Aotearoa who are organising expressions of support. We encourage individuals and congregations within our Connexion to take meaningful action—whether through public statements, community engagement, or pastoral care—to ensure that our LGBTQ+ whānau know they are not alone.

The Gospel calls us to love one another as Christ has loved us. Love does not tolerate harm. Love does not stand by in silence. Love acts. We choose love.

## TRINITY COLLEGE STATEMENT

Trinity Methodist Theological College expresses deep concern over the increasing presence of homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia in Aotearoa New Zealand, often justified through theology, scripture, and political rhetoric. We condemn the actions of senior cabinet ministers who continue to use racist and xenophobic language in Parliament, demeaning immigrant communities. We strongly denounce Destiny Church's attempts to disrupt the Pride Parade and incite violence at a children's event, all under the guise of faith. Additionally, we deplore the misuse of the Haka—an Indigenous expression of diversity and resilience—being distorted as a tool to spread hate and homophobia.

The global rise of ultra nationalism and the religious right, particularly within Christian fundamentalism, has had devastating effects on vulnerable communities. However, we are encouraged by the courageous public voices across different communities who challenge these supremacist ideologies with acts of care and solidarity.

As a theological institution of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, we stand firmly in solidarity with our LGBTQIA+ and migrant siblings. We acknowledge your pain, fear, grief, and anger, as well as the times when we have failed to stand alongside you in the fight against discrimination. We reaffirm our commitment to celebrating diversity and rejecting harmful theologies and ideologies that undermine the dignity of any person.

We echo the words of the President of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, spoken at Waitangi: *"The prophetic voice of our nation that we seek is not always found in the speeches of politicians or church leaders. But perhaps it is best reflected in the everyday people of Aotearoa—the people, Māori and non-Māori, tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti."*

In their name, we call upon the Coalition Government to practice MERCY, urge faith communities to embrace JUSTICE, and invite all people of goodwill to embody MANAAKITANGA, transforming our communities into sanctuaries of inclusion and affirmation. We remain committed to ministries of disruption and healing, engaging through worship, song, preaching, writing, research, and protest, to build a more just and compassionate society.



### **Sunlit Renaissance: Joy, Unity, Transformation**

*Rev Peter Norman, MCNZ Vice President*

I have been profoundly blessed to participate in the vibrant tapestry of functions, events, meetings and celebrations within Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa and I am continually reminded of the abundant blessings we share in this beautiful land.

#### **Embracing Transformation: A Call to Unity and Renewal**

As we recognise the ongoing work of restoration and reconciliation before us, moments of grace inspire us to move forward with a steadfast commitment and optimism. I eagerly look forward to deepening our connections in the coming months and warmly welcome invitations to join in our shared journey.

In these challenging times, our faith community stands as a beacon of hope and resilience against the rising tides of division and intolerance. We unequivocally condemn the voices of hatred and fear that seek to undermine the dignity of our people and the unity of our diverse whānau. Such forces not only attack individuals but also threaten to unravel the rich tapestry of justice, inclusion and cultural renaissance that we have diligently woven together.

The theme of Conference 2024, "Don't Just Change, Transform!" calls us to reimagine our future with boldness and creativity and to embark on a profound metamorphosis of our communities—and society as a whole. We envision an Aotearoa where constitutional renewal, grounded in tikanga and kawa, restores mana to tangata whenua and honours the rightful place of all indigenous peoples. This vision celebrates the power of shared decision-making, mutual respect, and the revival of ancestral values - principles that embrace diversity, uphold human rights and reject every form of exclusion.

Around the world we see inspiring examples of communities flourishing under indigenous leadership. These narratives affirm that a society rooted in justice and respect is not only desirable but attainable. Our collective future can be transformed by embracing a spirit that flows through the universe—the divine breath that animates all existence. This sacred presence calls us to dismantle systems of division and fear and to build a future where every person is cherished, every voice resonates and every community thrives in love, justice and unity.

In Te Hāhi Weteriana, our living faith is expressed through vibrant worship, compassionate service and unwavering solidarity with minority groups. Our mission, as articulated in our church's mission statement, is "to reflect and proclaim the transforming love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and declared in the Scriptures."

In the words of Jesus, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." This profound directive calls us to embody the love of God in all our interactions, serving as a testament to our faith and our commitment to one another. Recognising our role as an integral part of creation, we are called to act as kaitiaki- guardians of te taiao, the natural world - honouring our responsibility to protect and nurture the environment for future generations.

Let this be our rallying cry: to renew our collective responsibility, build bridges across cultures, and transform Aotearoa into a society where justice, inclusion and the flourishing of all communities are not lofty ideals but vibrant, everyday realities. Together, guided by the Spirit, we can illuminate the path toward a brighter, more harmonious future.



### **Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri: A New Chapter in Connexional Ministry & Leadership Support**

*TeRito Peyroux-Semu*

The newest part of the Methodist Church of New Zealand – Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri – is taking up its charge of supporting various ministries and ministry leadership across the Connexion. This vital new structure is dedicated to ensuring that those called to lead and serve in our Hāhi are equipped, encouraged, and strengthened in their work.

At the end of January, Rev Nicola Teague Grundy was inducted as Kai Hāpai, the Connexional Appointment lead for Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri. Supporting her in this important role is Matila Amani, who has been appointed as Executive Assistant to the Kai Hāpai. The work of Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri is strengthened by its Connexional Standing Committee, which represents the breadth of the church. I chair a committee that includes representation from:

- Te Taha Māori Rev Hoana Flay, Rev Keita Hotere, and Shirley Rivers
- Tauīwi: Rev Amos Muzondiwa, Dilys Davies, and Joshua Robertson
- Rangatahi/Youth: Amelia Takataka-Kaur and Ngahina Ranui

This diverse and experienced group ensures that Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri is grounded in the full breadth of our Connexional life and ministry. An immediate priority is to work further with Youth Ministry leadership to develop an appropriate model and appointment that will strengthen youth ministry across the church.

#### **A Name Rooted in Purpose**

The first meeting of the Committee on 14-15 February was a time of deep discussion and reflection as we explored the broad scope of responsibilities that Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri will oversee. The name Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri loosely translates as "*The Support Workers in the Background*", drawing from the Māori whakataukī (proverb):

*"Te Amorangi ki mua, te Hāpai Ō ki muri."*

*"The Leader at the front, and the Support Workers in the background."*

This proverb speaks to the balance of roles in marae protocol—where those who speak and lead are supported by those who work behind the scenes. Both roles are essential, working in equilibrium, for without one, the other cannot function effectively. This understanding lies at the heart of Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri's purpose: to stand behind and alongside the ministries of the church, ensuring that those in leadership and service have the resources, encouragement, and support they need to flourish.

#### **Beyond Traditional Parish Models**

One of the key insights from the inaugural hui was that Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri's role extends far beyond traditional parish models of ministry. The scope of its work is broad, diverse, and open to encompassing a wider range of leadership and ministry contexts within the Connexion.

#### **Looking Ahead**

As Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri takes its first steps, the journey ahead will be shaped by collaboration, responsiveness, and a deep commitment to the mission of the church. There is still much to learn and establish, but with a strong foundation of values and purpose, the work is already well underway.

I acknowledge the dedication and hard work of Rev Nicola and Matila, as well as the thoughtful diligence and care of the Connexional Standing Committee and all who are committed to ensuring the success and impact of this new chapter in the life of the Methodist Church. May Te Hāpai Ō Ki Muri continue to be a source of strength and support, ensuring that all parts of our church can thrive in their calling to serve God and community.



### Native Calendars, and Climate Change as Catalyst

*Rev Dr Jione Havea*

A *catalyst* is something - an energy or a body - that sparks a change. The change could be for bad, like bacteria causing illness, or for good, like yeast causing dough to rise (with which someone bakes something to share).

Some catalysts (including bacteria and yeast) have both good and bad effects. In church speak, "inspiration" applies to what a catalyst does, and "transformation" applies to the change that an inspiration sparks. Daily we live around catalysts/inspirations, for example, a story, a text, a teaching, a person, a memory, a spirit, a dream, an ancestor, a trauma, a struggle, etcetera. Those catalysts can spark change, for good and for bad – depending on how we engage them.

#### Climate Change

One of the critical challenges of our time is climate change. We have heard debates on the *causes* and *effects* of climate change. What and who is responsible? What do we leave for our kids and grandkids? How do we mitigate? Who should foot the bill?

YES, the *effects* of climate change are devastating and evolving, and traumatic. But climate change is also a *catalyst*. It causes change; and it can inspire us to think and do things – differently.

At the 2024 Pacific Islands Forum held in Tonga, UN Secretary-General António Guterres identified the way humanity "treated [the sea] like a sewer" as part of the problem ([see here](#)). He called on "big emitters" to "step up and lead, by phasing out the production and consumption of fossil fuels and stopping their expansion immediately."

How do we in Te Hāhi Weteriana / Methodist Church in Aotearoa New Zealand take this call as a catalyst/inspiration?

#### Climate Deniers

We have also heard some people, local and overseas, who deny climate change. Some members of our society deny responsibility for the destructive ecological changes. We can of course debate until the crows and the cows come home, but the bottom line is that climate change is taken to be a problem that needs to be reversed and resolved.

The debates around climate change have called attention to the damage and burdens that climate change brings upon the ecology, and the injustices and traumas that follow. Climate change is a big problem, and the heavy lifting falls upon poor and impoverished folk who contribute the least to the damaging and destruction of the ecosystem.

What if we see climate change as a catalyst? How might a change of attitude transform the way we understand and embrace climate change?

#### Native Calendars

To invite talanoa (story-telling, conversation) around the questions above, I offer two assertions – based on *one of* the native Tongan lunar calendars – relating to the life-world of Pasifika natives.

#### Reality based

First, in the Pasifika life-world, we know that *reality often differs from expectations*. In the Tongan yam calendar, for example, the three moon-cycles from mid-February to early-May are the rainy months when the yams grow the strongest. These are the spring months, and we expect the land to be green. That expectation is evident in the names of three moon-cycles – February-March: *Vai-Mu'a*/early waters; March-April: *Vai-Mui*/later waters; April-May: *Faka'afu-Mo'ui*/lively growth.



But reality is often different, because February to April is also our hurricane season. The springing of life is disrupted. There is growth, and there is also damage. The Pasifika life-world provides reality-checks upon our expectations (inscribed into our calendars).

### **Disaster ready**

Second, the life-world of Pasifika natives has *space for disasters*. There are thirteen moon-cycles in the Tongan yam calendar, and the names of three moon-cycles (October 15ish to December 27ish) anticipate struggles with the harshness of the ecosystem.

The September moon-cycle is when planting of the second season of yams takes place, and this will empty out the storehouses of families and villages. After the planting, there will not be a lot of food left for the next several months.

The three moon-cycles that follow are hotter-summery months, and their names warn Tongan natives to expect hardship and struggles: *Fufū-ki-nekinanga* (October moon-cycle) refers to a sunny, dry and deathly time of the year; *'Uluenga* (November moon-cycle) refers to a time when the *'ulu*/head of the land (that is, the leaves) is *enga*/yellow; *'O'oa-mo-fāngongo* (December moon-cycle) warns Tongans that the sea will also be 'sunny' (hostile, antagonistic). Our spring season begins with the January moon-cycle, and the rains come with the February-March moon-cycle – along with the hurricanes.

Every year, three moon-cycles orient Tongans to hardships and struggles with ecological strains. Native Tongans are thus conditioned to prepare for facing and surviving ecological hardship. In this connection, the problem becomes a catalyst. And in my humble opinion, we could take the same approach toward climate change.

If our life-world orients toward hardship and toward learning to survive those hardships, instead of being oriented to prosperity - in the names of development and economics - then it would be easier for us to embrace climate as catalyst.

### **So what?**

I present the assertions above to invite talanoa, and rethinking, of how we engage with climate change. We may not live in the Pasifika life-world, nor according to the Tongan lunar calendar, but there is space for considering if and how climate change is a catalyst. Also, there are opportunities in learning and engaging with native calendars.



Ngā mihi nui

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I welcome feedback on content included in Touchstone.



### New Staff and New Roles at The Connexional Office



A staffing restructure at the Connexional Office involving new roles for two existing staff and one new face at the front desk, will alleviate some of the work pressure on the General Secretary.

We welcome **Licinda Wait**, as Receptionist and Administrator in her first paid appointment since she graduated with a degree in data analytics from private tertiary education provider, CTU Training Solutions. She started her study in South Africa and completed her course in NZ when she emigrated in 2022.

Lucille Havenga has stepped into a new position as Executive Assistant to the General Secretary and former receptionist Caitlin Griffiths has taken on a position as Personal Assistant to the General Secretary. As Tara benefits from the support of two seasoned, dedicated and highly capable support staff, Licinda is swiftly adapting to her new workplace in a new country of residence.



### WesleyCare Residents Enjoy Ōtautahi Outing

On Tuesday 14 January 2025 a group of WesleyCare residents boarded a public bus along with caregivers for a trip across Ōtautahi in the first of what will be a regular highlight on the rest home's outings and activities schedule.

On arrival at St Martins, the group of eight octogenarians, some supported by walkers and others in wheelchairs, and their supporters alighted for a visit to the local supermarket and to the adjoining café before returning to their Papanui rest home in time for lunch.

It was the inaugural Orbiter outing for WesleyCare residents in the rest home, hospital and palliative care unit. Over coming weeks every resident will be given the opportunity to participate in the across-town-outing.

Conceived and coordinated by the Wesleycare activities coordinator team, plans for the 'maiden Orbiter voyage' were first discussed late last year. WesleyCare manager Donna Coxshall was receptive to the concept, as were the residents and their families. Covid disrupted regular outings and there was a collective enthusiasm for a chance to participate in a fun, well supported, off site outing available to everyone. All residents have been assigned to a group, and over the next ten weeks, each of those groups will gather at the bus stop adjacent to the main entrance and get onboard a bus that passes every 10 minutes.

WesleyCare operate a van for village residents who live independently onsite, and the rest home residents however the van is not suited to all mobility requirements of those living in the rest home, hence the public bus service offers an alternative for outings. An added bonus is that Gold Card holders are entitled to free public transport on the Christchurch Metro bus service during off-peak hours.

The residents reported back that they enjoyed doing something different. "Enjoyable morning tea, lovely staff accompanied us". "Good to see the changes since the earth quakes". "Great fun, nice to be out with friends". "It was great to be able to purchase my own fruit from the supermarket. Love to do it again but go somewhere different".





### Wasewase Sustainable Coastline Climate Justice Initiative

*Talatala Joeli*

Summer (Raumati) in Aotearoa is a season many of us look forward to annually. Traditionally it is said that Te Rā (the sun) and Hine Raumati (the summer maid) had a child, Tānerore. The saying, 'Te haka a Tānerore' (Tānerore's war dance) refers to the shimmering of hot air during summer.

Summer is a period where we enjoy life outdoors, the weather, nurture livestock and plants, and enjoy scenery that resembles the glory of God and its promises. It is also the season of Christmas, a time of gathering and healing and celebrating God's promise of peace and justice on earth.

Our advances to move with technology, combined with the rapid development and growth of humanity, have desecrated the earth, created as good and beautiful by God.

In July last year, at the Wasewase AGM, a Climate Justice paper was presented encouraging our church youth to join a group dedicated to cleaning up our coastlines.

The idea was conceived when my family had a Saturday lunch at Buckland's Beach. We witnessed a group cleaning the beach, enjoying the sun and working for the common good.

Further discussion occurred at the congregation levels, and we were excited to introduce the concept to the Wasewase. Each Tabacakacaka was fully aware of its implications and what they could contribute to their local communities.

The Connexional E-messenger shared a story about the New Plymouth Samoan Youth picking up trash at one of their beaches. This powerful message challenged today's youth to leave their comfort zones and challenge the status quo.

Youth need new challenges to revitalise how they see nature in their local surroundings and appreciate the meticulous handiwork of the creator. The developing world has caused much disconnection.

We took this idea to join local groups already engaged in cleaning up beaches and we joined the Sustainable Coastline group. They provide schedules for gatherings at nominated beaches to pick up trash. They provide all the necessary safety gear and collection bins, and we provide the manpower to do the task.

I moved to Wellington Wesley Parish recently. Here the coastlines of the southern tip of the North Island are very tempting to members of the Fijian and Tongan congregations, for recreation activities and for collecting seafood.

The idea is to make this one of our Climate Change initiatives this year, and it will be known as "Welly Southern Tip Clean." A *matasiga* or cell group, whose members reside in the areas close to the south Wellington coastlines, is now taking the initiative to spearhead this project. They will work in partnership with stakeholders like the Wellington City Council for example, and other community groups, who are also focused on the same initiative.

The message is clear, as was told to our forefathers in Genesis, we must look after the blessings that our God has given us. It is our duty, as tasked by God, to do so.



### **Te Matatini O Te Kāhui Maunga He Kāhui Tupua He Kāhui Wairua**

#### **Rev Keita Hortere**

The last time Te Matatini National Kapa Haka Festival was held in 2023, it took place at Ngā Ana Wai, Eden Park, Auckland. This year the festival took place at Pukekura Park – Bowl of Brooklands, Ngāmotu.

An impressive lineup of poi manu dressed in 1860s colonial dress showcased the powerful poi manu message of welcome to the visitors. The performance captured the history, boundaries, waka, and prophetic messages of the Poropiti Māori from this region within Te Kāhui Maunga. The collective mountain ranges encompass the people and places extending from Ngāti Apa, Te Pā O Ngā Ariki at Ratana Pā in the south through to Ruapehu and to Te Maunga Tītohea a Taranaki and the surrounding iwi of Taranaki, including manawhenua Ngāti Te Whiti.

The poi pōwhiri was followed by five days of intense kapa haka competition at Pukekura Park, with teams from around the country and Australia. The event was a huge success, thanks to the collaborative efforts of the National Matatini Society, Te Kāhui Maunga committee, and 700 dedicated Ringa Hāpai volunteers who ensured everything ran smoothly.

Volunteers, dressed in different coloured t-shirts, took on various roles, from ticketing and ushering, to providing transport and catering for kaumātua. Their hard work and dedication were greatly appreciated by all attendees.

Tui Wichman said, *"We never wanted for anything. Ringa Hāpai were always there for you"*. Workers in orange t-shirts in the marketplace ensured those in tents were well taken care of. Green t-shirted people were responsible for the rubbish duties and parakore recycling. Blue t-shirted people worked the inside of the tents, Matakura, Matapū, Whakatairi, Kāhui Pahake.

Ringa Hāpai Patu Maruera, said *"It was a real privilege for those of us who live away from home to contribute and help support this Kaupapa. And we are very grateful for our stay at the Mission House."*

The success of Te Matatini 2025 is a testament to the power of collective action and the strong sense of community the theme *Te Kāhui Maunga, Te Kāhui Tupua, Te Kāhui Wairua* invoked. This event brings significant economic benefits to the region and highlights the importance of cultural events in building community.

All three of our Methodist church sites in New Plymouth were used in some capacity to support the kaupapa of Te Matatini and we are grateful to the New Plymouth Samoan Methodist Parish for their continued support. We are also thankful for all the organisers, storeholders, and Kaihaka performers and their whānau supporters who were cooks, drivers, hosts on marae and at motels, and community hall workers. We acknowledge the many sponsors, broadcasters, Te Māngai Paho, Te Korimako o Taranaki, Māori TV and presenters who facilitated the media spaces and our own rangatahi using social media platforms to bring alive our kapa haka culture to the world.

We end with the whakataukī proverb Tā Herewini Parata used in his opening address. *Mā wai e taurima te marae i waho rā?. Mā te tika, mā te pono, mā te aroha.*

Who will tend to the places where we gather? We will, for we know it will be achieved through integrity, honesty, and a great love for one another.



## Jim's Cartoon

*Brendan Boughen*

Our regular cartoon that finds the funny side of faith.



## REFLECTION



### EPIPHANY

*Brenda Fawkner nee Abusombra*

**Childhood memories of growing up in New Plymouth as the daughter of Lebanese immigrants prompted Deacon Brenda Fawkner to write a short story. We share the story that received a Ronald Hugh Morrieson literary award.**

It was an epiphany. "You know," they said, "we can't watch the news any more. It's too sad and it makes us cry."

As they were speaking, a conversation from six decades ago came back to me echoing those same depths of emotion that brought tears. My mother was recounting a visit with my father to his homeland. The first time in sixty-five years. We had heard of this beautiful place where he had grown up, the land of "milk and honey", on the Golan Heights in Northern Palestine. The anticipation had grown as he drew nearer to his village and the home that he remembered.

They arrived. The village had been wiped out and there was nothing there. "He cried," she recalled. "Cried for the elderly parents whom he had deserted as a young man of 18, leaving them bereft. He cried for the guilt that they had died with broken hearts."

The 20-year-old me, heard the story, but it didn't really resonate. My father embarrassed me. He spoke in broken English, he was emotional. He got angry when he couldn't understand something or if someone spoke too fast. When I went shopping with him, I wanted to disappear as he always had to bargain *and* he cried in public.

I remember asking my mother, as a young child. "Why didn't I have a boy Daddy? Why was he different from other Daddies?" Goodness knows what she thought!

He was 50 years old when I was born. After five sons; a daughter, he told the neighbourhood, He danced the Dabke, waving his handkerchief. He adored me. It was overwhelming. Too much.



## REFLECTION

The young me heard the story and pretty much wrote it off. I was frustrated with him and his friends. Whenever they were together they went on and on about what had happened and was still happening. They wouldn't let it go. Finally, I just came out with it.

"You know Dad, there's another side to the story, these people needed a home, no one wanted them, where else could they go. Think of the Holocaust." I'd just finished reading Leon Uris's book *Exodus*. His body language warned me. His eyes sparkled with anger and he exploded.

*Yes, younger me you deserved that. Yes, I didn't understand.*

Mother had cautioned me. She told me "My friends have warned me that when children leave home for further education, when they came home, they think they know it all."

*I still feel squirmy inside me now, remembering. How could I?*

I'll share a secret, what our family did so that they would feel accepted in this culture. They took advice and translated our name from Arabic. All my young life though, I was reminded that I was different whenever I wrote my name. I was ashamed of one of them because I thought it sounded ugly. Its meaning is star and it was my Setti's (my grandmother's name). I usually left it out.

*How could you, young me? How cruel you were. I'm crying now.*

We were hidden in plain sight, safely ensconced in an ordinary house on an ordinary street. So ordinary I was taken aback when Tukapa Street was described as looking like a pair of dentures! Thankfully ours was the bottom set and our Maunga watched over us. Every day it informed me whether I'd need a raincoat or not. Every day Stan Riley drove his tram by my house at regular intervals in Westown. Every day I'd sit on our stepped concrete wall in front of the grass verge, in my safe place.

Come now with me into my long kept secret world, my home.

"*Ahlan Wa Sahlan! Ahlan Wa Sahlan,*" my father greets you. (My first Arabic words as a babe).

*I think now, why haven't I taught my children.*

This is how we welcome our guests. Arms are wrapped around you with warm hugs and kisses on your cheeks and yes men included. I hear you gasp, what has just happened? You have stepped into a culture within a culture. You are now transported to another world. A world of generous hospitality.

"Come come, you must eat." Before us is a feast, *koosa, olives malfou mahshi, kibbeh, maujadara, baklava.* "Please please, you must have more."

*I'm jolted back to the present. I listen to their story. They are open, they are vulnerable but they are not strangers, they are my sister and brother. I reveal myself to them and see warmth and love and understanding in their eyes.*

*'Why did you change your name? It's not difficult,' they say.*

*Here we are in New Plymouth, informed this week that New Zealand is the 4th most peaceful country in the world? I emerge from the cocoon. It has taken decades. Are they talking about someone else's story?*

*No, it's mine.*



## **The Gift of Sight: A Miracle**

*Murray Sheard, CEO cbm New Zealand*

Worldwide, 45 percent of people with a vision impairment are living with conditions that could have been treated or prevented, meaning they are needlessly blind. Cbm is working to provide the miracle of sight for those impacted. "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." – 1 Corinthians 13:13

Aanand, a seven-year-old child from rural Nepal, wanted to play marbles with the other children, however he could not see well enough to play. The other children mocked him and sent him away.

As a bright child with a love for learning, Aanand and his parents had high hopes for his future. When he was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes, suddenly all that promise, and those ambitious dreams, began to fade.

Living in one of the world's poorest places, there was no way Aanand's parents could afford the urgent cataract surgery he needed. They knew that without treatment, he was at risk of permanent blindness. His mother, Bhulli, said,

"It really hurts me as a mother to see my son suffering."

Aanand had hopes for a career that enabled him to assist others who faced a future of hardship and unkindness due to curable conditions, like his cataracts.

"After studying, I want to become a doctor. I want to fix the eyes of other children who are suffering."

### **Give the Miracle of Sight**

As we enter this Easter season of prayer, reflection and gift giving, it's a wonderful time to share our blessings with children and adults in need. Your generous gift today can give a child, like Aanand, the precious gift of sight—a gift that transforms lives forever.

You can be part of the miracle they hope for.

We urge you to prayerfully consider sending a gift of \$35, or an amount of your choosing, to help answer prayers and make dreams come true.

When kind people decide to act, extraordinary things happen. Your gift will mean more than just better eyesight; it will bring dignity, opportunity, and hope.

To help transform the lives of more children like Aanand, please prayerfully consider sending a gift today by phoning 0800 77 22 64 or on cbm's website [www.cbmnz.org.nz](http://www.cbmnz.org.nz).

Your generosity will bring the miracle of sight-saving cataract surgery to adults and children living in poverty. Thank you for your kind and caring heart.



## Season of Lent 2025; Focus on What's Important!

*Tokanga Filiai, NZMWF Treasurer*

The beginning of the year is always exciting, with everyone returning from their holiday to transition back into school, work, and regular home life. As the world returns to its usual rhythm, let's explore practical ways during this SEASON OF LENT 2025 to focus on what is important!

For many of us, March marks the return to a more structured routine. Children return to school, work projects pick up speed, and the lull of summer gives way to a renewed focus on goals and productivity. There is a collective shift in mindset that happens around this time. We move from the relaxation of the summer holiday into a period of planning and goal setting, making it the perfect moment to refocus and realign with our intentions.

Do you ever feel like you wasted your day? You may have started with the intention of knocking out two or three goals, getting that 30-minute walk, or achieving specified career goals, but you never quite get things done. Some days I start with the best intentions and accomplish a lot. Other times, I wonder where the day went.

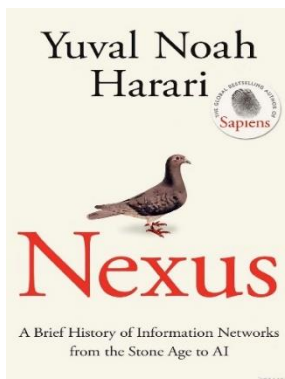
### **The Power of Focus**

Staying focused on what is important in life means prioritising and actively directing your attention towards the most valuable things. My camera has a setting that I used recently called spot focus. It compels the camera to focus on a point in the centre of the view and disregards the surroundings. Focus is the ability to understand what matters most and act accordingly. It involves being present in the moment and acknowledging that every action has consequences. The power of focus enables us to prioritise our goals, stay on track, and make progress towards achieving them.

Matthew 14:29. Peter climbed out of the boat and walked on the waves. As long as he focused on Jesus, he walked towards Him on the water. However, the moment Peter changed his focus and looked down at the wind-whipped waves beneath him, that's precisely where he ended up.

Why did Peter sink? Instead of focusing on his goal of reaching Jesus, he fixated on the strong waves below him. He was paying more attention to the problems than to reaching his destination. This serves as an excellent example of what happens when people focus on issues rather than solutions. Maintaining focus is essential to living an intentional, God-honouring life. This is how we can embrace a life full of meaning rather than spending our time on distractions.

May this season of Lent be a time of reflection, growth, and spiritual renewal. Most importantly, focus on what's important!



### **Nexus : A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI.**

*Adrian Skelton*

This is a book that all those with influence, and those who would simply understand our epoch, should read. As the author of *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*, Harari needs no introduction as a writer of *Big History*.

This book comes at a pivotal point in human history. We know already that Harari is cautious about AI. His point here is that *now* is the time to influence the source-code of AI – to embed humanistic values that may just survive once we lose control of the code, as AI-enhanced computers reinvent themselves.

"The computer-based network ... is likely to create inter-computer mythologies that will be far more complex and alien than any human-made god." We get serious when we begin to understand intersubjective realities – "things like laws, gods, nations, corporations and currencies."

Chapter 4 is perhaps the most important for religious readers because "at the heart of every religion lies the fantasy of connecting to a superhuman and infallible intelligence... (S)tudying the history of religion is highly relevant to today's debates about AI." Information technology *can* be allowed self-correcting mechanisms. For the holy books of the major religions there is no correcting if the original is considered to be divinely inspired and infallible.

The role of *Facebook* in the catastrophe of the massacre of Rohingya Muslims is well-known but not apologised for. The cause: "humans are more likely to be engaged by a hate-filled conspiracy theory than a sermon on compassion." Such human-made disasters should impel us to be ready to regulate AI: "Humans still have a lot of control over the pace, shape and direction of this revolution – which means we also have a lot of responsibility."

The danger is that computers may create "inter-computer realities", analogous to (human) intersubjective realities. "The computer-based network... is likely to create inter-computer mythologies that will be far more complex and alien than any human-made god."

There is a glimmer of hope towards the end of the book: "As long as democratic societies understand the computer network, their self-correcting mechanisms are our best guarantee against AI abuse ... The good news is that if we eschew complacency and despair, we are capable of creating balanced information networks that will keep their own power in check." Information now rules our lives. Get up to date by studying this timely treatise.



### **Connecting Records, Places and People**

*Emanuella de Ruiter, Digital Archivist MCNZ*

At Kei Muri Māpara, we have the privilege of caring for fascinating collections that encompass more than 200 years of Aotearoa New Zealand's history. As part of this work, we have been digitising a wide range of material helping people connect with their past and discover their family history and whakapapa. We also often support the wider Connexion with archival requests and assist the public with historical research, both online and in person.

A recent request related to New Zealand Methodist missionaries in the Solomon Islands when, Simon Chivers, reached out to us from the UK after discovering photographs of his grandparents and father on a collection of [photograph albums](#) we uploaded to Recollect.



## Connecting Records, Places and People (cont'd)

Simon's research enquiry was related to his grandparents, Frank and Gladys Chivers, who belonged to one of New Zealand's first missionary groups in the Solomon Islands. They arrived in 1922, along with their young son Billy (Simon's father). Tragically, their time in the Pacific came to an end in 1927 when Gladys passed away from blackwater fever. Simon reached out to us in the hope that we could help him locate his grandmother's grave, as he is planning a trip to the Solomon Islands to visit the site. His initial research indicated that she was buried in a mission graveyard in Haevo.

A keyword search across our collection catalogue and Recollect site revealed several promising leads. Our personal papers and historical records collection contained a handwritten letter from 1972 by Bill Chivers, Simon's father, addressed to Reverend George Carter. In the letter, Bill reflected on his father's missionary work and mentioned searching for his mother's grave during a visit to the Solomon Islands – poignantly mirroring Simon's intended trip.

Further searches revealed first-hand accounts of Gladys Chivers' passing. An article in [The Open Door - Vol. 6 No. 1 \(June, 1927\)](#) described her sudden illness and the efforts to save her, stating she was buried in Haivo (possibly an alternative spelling of Haevo):

*"Sisters Elizabeth Common and Lilian Berry, with the doctor from Gizo, did all they could to save her, but their efforts were of no avail. ...Beautiful wreaths and ropes of flowers covered the coffin on the day of the funeral. ...The cortege was a very impressive one, as it wended its way down to the cemetery at Haivo."*

Further evidence pointing us to the location of Gladys' grave appeared in [The New Zealand Methodist Times \(16 July 1927\)](#), where missionary Helena Goldie noted that Gladys was buried beside her own son:

*"What a tragedy the loss of Mrs. Chivers seems! My heart aches for little Billy and his poor father and all those belonging to them. ...They buried her next to my little boy and made a big square round the two graves."*

We encountered conflicting accounts of Gladys' burial site, because of the use of various place names that are no longer used, as well as possible misspellings. Ultimately, it was personal letters held in Frank Chivers' file in our Life and Labour records and the Overseas Missions Department collection that provided the clearest evidence.

One letter stated: *"We understand that the little Roviana Cemetery was not disturbed by the Japanese Munda airfield, and the graves of the little one of Rev. Goldie, Gladys Chivers, and others, are still intact."*

Another letter offered a more precise location: *"...[Frank's] wife Gladys died of blackwater fever and is buried in the Kokegolo (now called Munda) cemetery."*

This aligns with other secondary sources indicating that Gladys was laid to rest in Munda, Roviana Bay, and it also provides reassurance that her grave remained undisturbed through WWII.

Simon's enquiry is a great example of the value of accessible online archives for historical research, and how they can help individuals reconnect with their heritage to uncover stories that might otherwise remain lost.