



## **Māori Wards and the Call of Justice**

Te Aroha Rountree, President Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, Methodist Church of New Zealand

**In Aotearoa, the issue of Māori wards in local government has sparked passionate debate, raising vital questions about democracy, representation, and justice.**

From a Māori Methodist perspective — grounded in Te Ao Māori and the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ — the conversation around Māori wards is not merely political. It is deeply spiritual. It is

about honouring the sacredness of whakapapa, recognising Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) as a covenant, and embodying the justice that God calls us into as whānau of Christ.

At the heart of the Methodist view is Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For many Methodists, Te Tiriti is the embodiment of a living covenant that guides our relationships, both spiritual and political. It affirmed tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) of Māori and promised partnership relationships. Yet, for over 180 years, those promises have been repeatedly broken. The legacy of colonisation, land confiscations, and systemic exclusion of Māori voices in governance has led to deep spiritual and social wounds. The establishment of Māori wards is one small but significant way to begin to honour that covenant — by making space for Māori to have genuine representation in local decision-making.

To deny Māori wards is, in effect, to continue marginalising Māori voices — voices that were never lost, but deliberately silenced. Māori wards do not give special privilege; they offer rightful participation. They are a necessary correction to historical imbalance, and from a Methodist lens of justice and equity, they are long overdue. The Methodist Church has long embraced a theology of liberation — a belief that God is present in the struggle for justice, especially among the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed. In the ministry of Jesus, we see a radical inclusion of those who were left on the margins: the leper, the Samaritan, the widow. Jesus never asked whether these people had earned their place; he simply made space for them.

The creation of Māori wards is aligned with that gospel vision. It is about creating a table where Māori are not just welcome but are hosts and co-designers. Māori Methodists, holding both te ao Māori and te Rongopai (the Gospel), understand that justice cannot be delayed — and comes at a cost. Our communities are facing disparities in health, housing, education, and incarceration. These are not just political issues; they are wairua issues. They are gospel issues. To resist Māori wards is to resist the movement of God among us — the God who hears the cry of the oppressed and calls for systems to be transformed.

In te ao Māori, tikanga (customs), mana (dignity and authority), and mana motuhake (autonomy) are not just cultural terms — they are theological ones. They define how we relate to each other, to the land, and to the Divine. When local councils do not reflect the tangata whenua of their rohe, these relationships are broken. Māori wards provide an avenue for tikanga to be expressed in governance. They offer a pathway for Māori values — such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship of the environment), whanaungatanga (relational accountability), and kotahitanga (unity) — to shape policies that affect our communities. In doing so, they reflect the Methodist emphasis on social holiness — the belief that faith must transform society, not just individual hearts.

Furthermore, Māori representation in local government is not about division; it is about restoration. When Māori flourish, all of Aotearoa flourishes. Equity is not a zero-sum game. From a Methodist perspective, honouring mana motuhake strengthens our collective identity as a nation. The church cannot remain silent in this kōrero. As followers of Christ and as members of a bicultural covenantal church, we must be courageous in our advocacy. Māori Methodists — and our allies within the wider Connexion — are called to stand with those who seek justice. That means speaking out against misinformation, resisting racist rhetoric, and challenging systems that preserve the status quo.

It also means living into the hopeful vision of Revelation — a vision where all peoples and tongues stand together in worship, not in assimilation, but in unity amid diversity. Māori wards are a step toward that vision. They are a small piece of the larger redemptive work of reconciliation that the gospel demands. Māori wards are not the end of the journey, but they are a crucial step toward a more just and inclusive Aotearoa. From a Methodist perspective, they embody the values of Te Tiriti, the teachings of Christ, and the wisdom of our tupuna. Let us move forward not with fear, but with faith — faith that justice, grounded in aroha, will lead us closer to the world God longs for.



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### A Joyful Encounter with Faithful Servants



Recently, I had the honour of visiting the Waikato Supernumeraries as **President of MCNZ**. It was a deeply humbling and affirming experience; a moment of reflection, reconnection, and celebration.

Gathered in a warm and welcoming space, I had the privilege of sharing time with those who have dedicated decades of faithful service to the life and mission of the Church. Among the group were Rev Fred Gilbert and Rev

Joan Wedding, whose stories of ministry from the Far North to the Deep South reminded me of the richness and resilience of our collective journey in faith.

The Waikato region holds a special place in the life of the Church, and the supernumeraries—those who have retired from active ministry but continue to embody and share the Gospel—carry with them the deep wisdom of experience and the enduring spark of service. These are the people who have helped shape our Church's identity, guiding congregations through changing times with compassion, humility, and strength.

Rev Fred Gilbert, now 98 years of age, spoke with gentle clarity about his time serving in various parishes across Aotearoa. His stories carried the weight of memory but were shared with a lightness that comes from a life of deep faith and conviction. He recalled travelling long distances, often under challenging conditions, to ensure that isolated communities received pastoral care and connection. His words painted pictures of small rural churches alive with song, of cups of tea shared after worship, and of relationships forged over decades.

Equally moving were the stories shared by Rev Joan Wedding. With a keen sense of humour and a sharp memory, Joan recalled her years of ministry in both urban and rural contexts. Her reflections reminded us all of the evolving role of women in ministry and the perseverance required to lead in spaces that weren't always welcoming. Joan spoke of the early days when women ministers were rare and sometimes met with scepticism. Yet, she carried out her ministry with unwavering dedication, becoming a trusted leader and much-loved pastor to many. Her stories included moments of challenge—navigating resistance, overcoming isolation—but also moments of deep joy and grace. Listening to Joan and Fred share their experiences was a masterclass in ministry. It was a living history lesson, not just of our Church's past, but of the enduring values that still guide us today: whanaungatanga (relationship), manaakitanga (hospitality), and aroha (love).

As I looked around the room, I was struck by the sense of continuity. Though these ministers are no longer in formal appointments, their presence, wisdom, and spiritual leadership remain vital to our Church. They continue to mentor, pray for, and encourage those of us still in active ministry. Their lives are a testament to what it means to serve God and community over the long haul. I was also deeply moved by the hospitality extended to me. The warmth, laughter, and generosity in the room were unmistakable. As I left the gathering, I carried with me a renewed sense of purpose and hope. The faithfulness of our supernumeraries like Fred and Joan is not merely a relic of the past—it is a beacon for the future. Their stories remind us that while the contexts of ministry may change, the call remains the same: to love, to serve, and to walk humbly with our God.



## AROUND THE CONNEXION METHODIST ALLIANCE

### 'Accidental Methodist' Peter Glensor retires as long-time chair of the WCA board



Peter Glensor (centre) is joined by Hutt Mayor Campbell Barry, and Joss Elliott Property Manager at Wesley Rātā Village at a celebration for the opening of Kōwhai Court, 15 social housing apartments built in the former Wesleyhaven hospital.

If the local Baptist church had been closer to Peter Glensor's childhood home, he might never have had a lifelong, life shaping association with the Methodist Church.

Peter's parents had both been brought up as Baptists and his mother, in particular, wanted her children to go to Sunday School. However, the local Baptist Church was a long way from their home in central Upper Hutt while the Upper Hutt Methodist Church was just a short walk away.

The Methodist values he learned at Sunday School in the 1950s have always informed his life. Beyond many years of non-church service – starting with a year in Borneo as

a school-leaver with Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) in 1969 to many years spent raising awareness about the Treaty of Waitangi, running a community health service and serving as a local government politician - Peter has always been committed to being a "modern Methodist".

He has been a parish minister, an ecumenical leader, a parish community worker, a member of the group that led the Methodist Church's commitment to becoming a bicultural organisation in 1983 and a leading force in setting up the Methodist Alliance.

Peter recently retired as Chair of the board of Wesley Community Action, after being involved with the board for 25 years.



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## Staying in Our Lane

Rev John Carr

**Recently, David Seymour told churches to “stay in your lane,” in response to congregations speaking out against his push to remove Māori wards. That lane is the road of justice, compassion and faithfulness.**

Seymour suggested that faith and politics should not mix. He suggested that churches should “get back to God.” But if we take the Gospel seriously, then staying in our lane means exactly what those churches were doing. Our lane has always been the way of

Christ, and that path runs straight through questions of justice, power, and community.

From the beginning, to say *Christ is Lord* was never just a private comfort. It was a bold and political claim in the Roman Empire. Across the empire, people were expected to declare “Caesar is Lord.” The phrase appeared in the imperial cult of Rome, where citizens offered incense before the emperor’s image. It was spoken in the marketplaces where loyalty was pledged, in the arenas where crowds gathered, and even inscribed on coins that carried Caesar’s face and title. To refuse that declaration was to risk exclusion, punishment, or worse. Against that backdrop, Christians dared to proclaim that Jesus, not Caesar, was Lord. It was not only a spiritual confession but a public defiance of imperial power.

In my own ministry, the bi-cultural journey has been central. Every time we say *Nau mai, haere mai* in worship, we are not just repeating a phrase; we are receiving and extending the deep welcome of tangata whenua. That welcome invites us to belong, to stand on this land together with dignity and respect. What kind of people would gladly accept that invitation, benefit from the manaakitanga offered, and then turn around to refuse support for those who welcomed them?

For Methodists, no, for Christians in Aotearoa, the call of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* echoes the Gospel’s demand for justice: to honour covenant, to walk together, to share power and decision-making. To follow Christ means more than accepting hospitality; it means standing in solidarity with our hosts, our neighbours, our whanaunga. Supporting Māori wards is one way we live out that covenant faithfulness, ensuring Māori voices are not sidelined but given the rightful place promised long ago.

So yes, the church should stay in its lane. But let us be clear about what that lane is. It is the road of justice, speaking up when communities are excluded. It is the road of compassion, standing alongside those who carry heavy burdens. And it is the road of faithfulness, holding fast to the conviction that God’s love is wider than fear, greed, or division. That is Jesus’ lane, and if that lane takes us into the public square, then that is exactly what the Gospel requires of us.





## Golden Church Celebrates Golden Anniversary

Kerry Upson

In August, St John's Golden Church (St John's Co-operating Church) in Whangarei celebrated 50 years since the opening of the church centre.

The site was originally purchased in 1943 by the Methodist Church in response to significant new housing growth in the area and named Leigh Memorial. Sunday School and worship first held in the lounge of the church house, quickly outgrew this space.

Growing congregation numbers were accommodated in an Airforce hut purchased in 1945 and in an historic chapel moved from Oruaiti in the North the following year.

By 1964 growth and funds allowed for the building of the Leigh Memorial Hall. The church had become an important part of the local community and in the late 1960s, as church union was gaining momentum, discussions began with neighbouring congregations. St. John's-Leigh Church was inaugurated in December 1971, drawing its membership from Presbyterian (St. John's), Methodist (Leigh Memorial) and Congregational Churches as well as Associated Churches of Christ.

Plans were initiated to build a new church centre, incorporating a worship centre, childcare centre, and the existing hall. Approval was gained in 1974 and building started. As the building neared completion, the Whangarei community was taking great interest in the new facilities. Some controversy was created when the building was painted a rich golden colour on the recommendation of the architect, Kelvin Grant. The decision generated much discussion with opinion divided on the colour choice.

On 23 August 1975, an overflowing congregation of 800 people gathered for the official opening of St John's Church Centre.

In 2025, St John's Golden Church continues to be recognised as a church that is open to the community - many events and facilities developed over the decades on the church site are available for the community.

That members of St John's still have this vision was obvious in the 50th Anniversary celebrations. On Saturday, an Open Day was held where members past and present and friends gathered for fellowship and to share fond memories. Dinner on Saturday evening gave plenty of opportunity for reminiscing and catching up with friends from the past. Rev Johanna Warren and Rev Alan Upson led the Sunday morning service, with participation from past ministers, two choirs and congregation members.

Rev Bob Te Whaiti (minister 1996-2003) shared special memories of his time at St John's and congregation members were invited to contribute to a commemoration banner. The service concluded with Jan Chamberlin's hymn The Church in the Marketplace. The words "the church in the marketplace, not just the pew" rang true for church members as they reflected on the St John's Mission Statement "We come to worship - we go to serve."



## **The First Tongan Lotu (Polotu) in Whanganui**

Rev. Sokopeti Feki Sina

A Tongan Lotu (Polotu) in Whanganui on Sunday, 13 July 2025, at Trinity Methodist Church, fulfilled a vision Rev. Sokopeti Feki Sina prayed for since she first arrived in Whanganui in 2024.

The service brought to life a desire to gather the Tongan community in worship and celebration of their faith and culture. This historic occasion was made even more meaningful with the support and participation of local leaders including Gumz Pati, from the Samoan community - representing the spirit of Pacific unity - and the President of the Rotary Club of Whanganui, Murray Cleveland and his wife Shelley.

The service was enriched by heartfelt speeches from a range of distinguished guests including Dr John Van Dalen, Paula Hausia, Tony Hodge, Dr Tevita Tu'ungafasi, Joy McGregor and Sione Na'a Sina, a long-time steward of the Tongan Methodist Church in Upper Hut.

Rev Sokopeti Feki Sina led the devotion, preaching from Psalm 133, calling the community to dwell together in love and oneness under God. The service was wrapped in Tongan hymnody. A special moment of spiritual encouragement came through the singing of Himi 391: "Tama Tonga, Tu'u 'o ngaue, ho koloa ke fakamonu. Lotu ki he 'Eiki ma'u pe..."

Following the worship, the congregation shared joyful fellowship. Laughter, storytelling, and words of blessing filled the hall, as connections deepened and dreams for future gatherings were spoken aloud. The Lotu Tonga will be held on the last Sunday of every month at 2pm at Trinity Methodist Church of Whanganui (183 Wicksteed Street).

The mission of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa is "to reflect and proclaim the transforming love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and expressed through the Holy Spirit." It is a church committed to being a bicultural, inclusive, and justice-seeking church, striving to live out its faith through compassionate service, community engagement, and prophetic witness.

This Tongan Polotu stands as a living embodiment of that mission, where love, justice, inclusion, and faith intersect in the context of culture and identity. It reflects a church that reaches into its communities and welcomes all people to worship in the richness of their languages and traditions.

The launch of the Tongan Lotu is not only a local milestone, but also a contribution to the ongoing mission of the whole Church. This first Tongan Polotu was a landmark moment for the Methodist Church of Whanganui and the Tongan community. It symbolised unity, cultural pride, and spiritual renewal. Beyond providing a place for Tongans to worship, witness, and thrive, it represents the Methodist Church's wider mission to reflect God's love in every context and to support diverse communities in their journey of faith.



## From the Streets to His Divine Sanctuary: The Rise of the Remnant Warriors

'Amelia Takataka-Kaur, Remnant Warrior

**In our Methodist tradition, baptism is usually carefully planned and celebrated within the familiar liturgy of newborn babies. But sometimes, God supernaturally interrupts tradition.**

On Sunday, 6 July 2025 Hamilton East Methodist Parish witnessed something that was not typical of our church life: a full immersion baptism of six adults, inspired by the call of the Holy Spirit. The baptism began with one man from the streets, a non-member, who came into church and said "Rev., I want to be baptised."

Baptism numbers grew within weeks as conversations moved hearts, and others stepped forward. The group known as **The Remnant Warriors** (Robin Aramatuku (Māori), Priti Griffin (Indian), Lisa Fuata (Rotuman), Aubrey Lasi (Samoan), Loata Baikaloko (Fijian), and 'Amelia Takataka-Kaur (Tongan) decided to receive full immersion baptism, at a pool in the Gallagher Aquatic Centre. For some it was the culmination of years of quiet prayer and Scripture reading. For others, it was a sudden conviction, a "now or never" moment that could not be ignored!

We thank President Elect Rev Alisa Lasi and Hamilton East Methodist Parish Council Chair Sione Molitika (Setuata Malolo), for their leadership and for responding to the Holy Spirit in performing the baptism, that was much more than a ritual. The group testified to powerful changes afterwards:

- A new lightness and peace, "God has opened my eyes."
- *Early morning prayer awakenings, without alarms, waking at 3.00am to pray for others by name.*
- *A hunger for the Word, through daily Bible reading, audio Scripture, and worship music.*
- *Boldness in worship, overcoming self-consciousness to raise hands and fully surrender in praise.*
- *A desire to be active in the life of the church, particularly our community outreach programmes, and supporting our youth and children.*

This moment reminded us that revival does not wait for committees or calendars. The Spirit moves when He wills. As a church, our role is to be ready for the supernatural calling outside of how we practice 'business as usual' church, with open hearts, open minds, and the willingness to respond to His divine Holy Spirit.

As we look ahead, our group is committed to regular Bible study, prayer, and fellowship, so this fire does not fade. For the wider Methodist family, it is a gentle but urgent reminder: God is still calling, still stirring, still surprising us even in ways outside our usual patterns.



## The Problem of “Heavenism”

Rev Dr Nasili Vaka’uta, Principal Trinity Theological College

**Some churches are more obsessed with getting people into heaven than with healing what is broken here on earth.**

**That is the heart of the problem I call *heavenism*—a kind of religious escapism that focuses on the afterlife and forgets the struggles of this life.**

You’ve probably heard it before: “Don’t worry, your reward is in heaven.” “This world is not our home.” “God will sort it out in the end.” But what if these kinds of sayings do more harm than good, especially for Indigenous, Pacific, and poor communities?

Heavenism is not just a belief in life after death. It’s a theology that tells people to accept suffering now for the promise of bliss later. And that message has a history. During colonisation, missionaries taught Pacific peoples to focus on saving their souls and preparing for heaven -while their lands were taken, cultures suppressed, and voices silenced. As long as the people were spiritually obedient, the empire was happy.

It’s no accident that many hymns and sermons preached during colonisation centred on heaven. In Tonga, we were taught, *ko e māmani ‘e mole kae mo’ui ‘a e langi*—“this world will pass, but heaven endures.” It sounds holy, but it’s also dangerous. It teaches people to give up on earth.

In modern churches, heavenism has morphed into something slicker. Some preachers now promise “heaven on earth” in the form of wealth, blessings, and divine favour—if you have enough faith and give enough money. This is the prosperity gospel. It sells success as a sign of God’s approval and poverty as personal failure. But it leaves out the systems that create injustice—colonialism, racism, economic exploitation, climate destruction.

The Bible, however, tells a different story. Jesus didn’t tell people to escape the world. He called them to transform it. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, lifted the poor, and challenged unjust leaders. His message was grounded in this life, not some distant paradise.

Our Moana cultures also teach that land and sea are sacred, not disposable. In Tongan, *fonua* means land, placenta, and grave—it’s where life begins and ends. Why would a faith that respects the land trade it for clouds and golden streets?

We need to move from heavenism to grounded hope. That means churches must care more about justice here and now than about judgment later. They must speak out on poverty, climate change, domestic violence, and inequality—not just offer prayers but push for change.

Faith should not be an escape from reality. It should be a fire in the heart that burns for justice, dignity, and healing in this life—not just the next.





## REFLECTION



### Recognising the Gift of Time

Rev Dr Susan Thompson

When I started as chaplain at Tamahere Eventide, I noticed how fast my co-workers walked. Everyone seemed to be in a hurry and I was in constant danger of being mown down in our corridors.

On reflection this wasn't surprising as staff have lots to do: helping residents get up in the morning; giving them their medications; cleaning, changing beds and tidying rooms; doing hourly checks and observations; running activities; fixing

things; cooking and serving meals; making sure rosters are filled and talking with families.

These things make us all busy as we try to meet our residents' physical needs. However I sometimes wonder if there's something else they need from us which we can offer them by not being so busy. That is the gift of our time. Offering residents the gift of our time might mean sitting with them and listening to their stories; joining in a game of bingo; sharing a cup of tea; going for a walk with residents; sitting by a bedside or simply being present when someone is sad or anxious.

When we do these things, we help to meet our residents' emotional, social and spiritual needs. We make them feel as if they're not alone, as if they have people who care. We give them a sense that they're still part of a wider world and have something to contribute. Hopefully we help them to feel valued, as if their lives have meaning.

All of our staff can do these things, whether we're a nurse or a caregiver, a cook or a cleaner, the CEO or the maintenance man. Our residents don't actually care what our job is; whether we're a healthcare professional or someone with absolutely no medical training or experience. They just want someone to stop, to pay attention and to spend some time.

When I speak to staff, I sometimes encourage them to try to slow down. In a workplace where there's always lots to do, that may sound counterintuitive. But to me, offering residents the gift of our time could be the most valuable thing we do for them in a day.



## CARTOON



"Ka tohu tenei i te pono o te whakatauki,  
'Poipoiā te kākano kia puāwai!'"

### Jim's Cartoon

Brendan Boughen

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



## A Weekend of Fellowship, Faith & Family

Moerah Feaunati

The 2025 Sinoti AGM held in Ōtara, Aukilani was a weekend of worship, talanoa, learning, and celebration. It was a true reminder of the strength of our church family.

Bringing together representatives from across Aotearoa from Thursday 7 to Sunday 10 August, Thursday opened with the Kai Hāpai o ki Muri team, including Rev. Nicola Grundy, Rev. Tara

Tautari, and Director of Safeguarding, Sonia Pope. It was a productive day of talanoa about the Methodist Church's mission statement and other important kaupapa for our church. We were blessed to welcome Sonia Pope, the newly appointed Director of Safeguarding, who brings a wealth of experience as a registered psychologist. Her vision for safe spaces within our church aiga gave us hope and encouragement for the future.

Friday was all about our tupulaga. Leaders from across Sinoti gathered for fellowship, to share successes and challenges, and plan for the year ahead. The day was filled with song, learning, games, fellowship and a few interruptions from our faifeau reminding us to "turn the music down!" That evening, the official opening of Sinoti AGM was led by Rev. Falaniko Mann-Taito and Henderson Methodist Church. Beautiful music, touching skits, and spirit-filled worship made for a powerful start to the weekend.

Saturday morning began with devotion and worship led by tupulaga. NYLO leader Silika Isaia led worship, accompanied on keys by Kenneth from Māngere Central Youth, preparing our hearts for an inspiring message from fellow NYLO leader Amuimuia Penese Pio on "Igniting the Fire." Amuimuia encouraged tupulaga and the wider church to keep their fire for God burning brightly in their leadership, their studies, their work, and in their everyday lives.

From there, we moved into a full day of reports and presentations from our faifeau, church committees, tupulaga, Puletua, and more. It was chaired and guided by our Superintendent, Rev. Paulo Ieli, who ensured the work of the church was carried out with clarity, purpose, and respect. It was a day of reflection, learning, and forward planning, reminding us of the important galuega happening throughout our ekalesia and itumalo.

Saturday evening was one of the highlights of AGM, the annual tausala. Each church and itumalo brought energy and colour with lively performances. The best part was seeing our parents and grandparents join in the fun, letting their hair down, and dancing alongside the tupulaga. It was a night of laughter, fiafia, and generosity, raising funds that will bless generations to come. On Sunday morning, the Sinoti Mission Choir lifted our spirits with their soul-stirring worship. Church was led by Rev. Iakopo Fa'afuata, who shared a heartfelt message as he looks towards retirement after many years of faithful service. His leadership and ministry were honoured with love and fa'afetai.

We give thanks to our māmā and tama in the kitchen who worked tirelessly to cook, serve, clean, and ensure everyone was safe. Their service and alofa did not go unnoticed. We also extend a special thank you to St Paul's Ōtara Methodist Church for hosting us and providing a beautiful space for fellowship.

Sinoti AGM 2025 reminded us of who we are, an ekalesia family rooted in Christ, strengthened by tupulaga, and united in mission. From the opening talanoa to the final pese, the weekend was a celebration of faith, aganu'u, and community.



## Message of Aroha - Humanitarian Crisis and Genocide in Gaza

Te Aroha Rountree President - Methodist Church of New Zealand | Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa

As followers of Jesus Christ—who called us to love our neighbour, seek justice, and walk humbly with God, we cannot remain silent in the face of the ongoing humanitarian crisis and genocide in Gaza.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa cannot remain silent in the face of the ongoing humanitarian crisis and genocide in Gaza.

With broken hearts and deep concern, we witness the unrelenting violence, destruction, and loss of innocent lives. Thousands of civilians, many of them children, have perished. Many have been torn apart and traumatised. Homes, hospitals, schools, and places of worship have been reduced to rubble. The intentional deprivation of food and clean water in Gaza constitutes a serious violation of human rights. Such actions intensify the brutality of occupation, inflicting profound harm on the most vulnerable—especially children. We affirm that this cruelty stands in direct defiance to the justice of God, desecrating the divine image inherent in every human being. This is not merely a tragedy; it is a violation of international law, a stain on our shared humanity, and a grave moral failing of the global community.

### A Call for Justice and Immediate International Response

We unequivocally condemn the ongoing acts of collective punishment against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which the international community must now recognise as genocide. As a church committed to justice, peace, and human dignity, we call upon:

- **The New Zealand Government** to take an unambiguous stand by formally recognising the genocide in Gaza, advocating for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and suspending all forms of military or economic support to parties responsible for the violence.
- **The United Nations and International Community** to mobilise immediate and unimpeded humanitarian aid, including food, medical supplies, shelter, and water, to the people of Gaza. Aid must be distributed with urgency, transparency, and according to international humanitarian principles.
- **Global faith communities and civil society** to rise in solidarity, raise their prophetic voices, and advocate for peace rooted in justice and the right of all peoples—Palestinians and Israelis alike—to live in safety and dignity.

The call for justice is not political rhetoric; it is a moral imperative grounded in our faith and our understanding of the Gospel. We remember the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.*" (Isaiah 1:17)

### A Word to Our Palestinian Whānau

To our Palestinian whānau (family) in Aotearoa and across the world, we extend our aroha (love), prayers, and solidarity. Your pain has not gone unnoticed. You are not alone. The Methodist Church of New Zealand stands with you in mourning and in hope. We honour your resilience, and your right to live free from occupation, fear, and violence. We lament the decades of displacement and dispossession that have brought us to this moment and recommit ourselves to working for a just and lasting peace.

In the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and our bi-cultural journey, we also speak from a uniquely Aotearoa context. Māori, as tangata whenua and as a people who have experienced colonisation, land confiscation, and systemic injustice, bring a vital voice to this moment. Our

histories and wisdom deepen our understanding of what it means to resist injustice with dignity, mana (authority), and hope.

Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa acknowledges the longstanding solidarity between Māori and indigenous peoples around the world, including the Palestinian people. This is a time to strengthen those ties, to uplift the voices of indigenous struggle, and to work together for liberation, healing, and peace.

We call upon all New Zealanders, regardless of background, to open their hearts, educate themselves, and stand up for what is right. Let us not be silent bystanders. Let us become a nation known for compassion, courage, and an unwavering commitment to human rights.

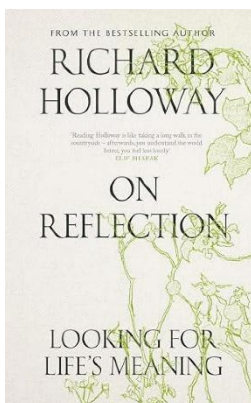
### **Our Hope and Our Prayer**

We are a people of hope. Even amid great suffering, we believe that peace is possible, that justice can prevail, and that love is stronger than hatred. The road to reconciliation is long and difficult, but it must begin with truth, accountability, and a collective commitment to end the violence. We urge our global leaders, our communities, and our churches to act now—not later, not when it is politically convenient, but now—because every moment of delay costs more lives. May the God of justice stir our spirits. May the Christ of compassion guide our hands. May the Spirit of peace unite us all.

**I roto i te aroha, i te whakapono me te tumanako.**



## **BOOK REVIEW**



### **On Reflection; Looking for Life's Meaning**

**Adrian Skelton**

The best books are somehow like conversations, and this is one of them. Author Richard Holloway doesn't get too far ahead of us, but leads us gently through his reflections, "looking for life's meaning." This collection of essays by Holloway, former Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, begins with a reflection on "the absence of God," a theme which has haunted him since his withdrawal from officiating in the Church.

Although rich in melancholy, these latest essays are also comforting, in the sense of a realisation that this is as good as it gets... or "This is IT," as one chapter proclaims. There is fundamental philosophy concerning "where all the ladders start." There are theologies of forgiveness and of grief. And there are deep appreciations of cultural icons like Yeats and Auden, Copland and Messiaen. Another theme which will be no surprise to those who know *Leaving Alexandria* is the importance of cinema: a parable is drawn powerfully from *Blade Runner* (1982).

A reflection on the Scottish character introduces a word new to me: 'antisyzygy' – "the contradictions of character...in...almost every distinguished Scot." Yet the message of Holloway, for all his Scots' pride, is universal advice: guard against religions overstepping their bounds. We may tolerate faiths that themselves are intolerant, only so long as their prejudices are contained within their own people. The issues which dominate this reflection are the liberation of women and the acceptance of gay people in secular society (but not yet into some conservative religions).

In the chapter on Secular Faith, there is a stark warning of the danger of what the 'Voice of God' in the head can lead to. The Voice telling you what *not* to eat is one thing, but the command to commit *genocide* is another. He concludes with a plea "for modesty and humility in the claims we make about how we see things." And a sentimental note on the poetry of Christmas Eve. And finally, the importance of gratitude for the universe, even if there is no one to thank.

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