



Celebrating 200 Years of Christianity in Tonga

In late June, Te Aroha Rountree, President MCNZ, joined people from the Kingdom of Tonga to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Christianity in Tonga. She reports on a remarkable milestone in the life of the Tongan people and the Church.

The story of Christianity in Tonga is one of transformation, resilience, and hope. Since the arrival of the early Wesleyan missionaries in the 19th century, the Gospel has become deeply woven into the fabric of Tongan society. Through the work of local leaders, ministers, teachers, and faithful congregations, Christianity has shaped the spiritual, cultural, educational, and social life of the nation.

We give thanks not only for the missionaries who travelled great distances to share the Good News but also for the countless Tongan men and women who embraced the Gospel and made it their own. The growth and strength of the Church in Tonga stand as a testimony to the faithfulness of God and the dedication of generations who have served Christ with humility and devotion. For MCNZ, this celebration is especially meaningful. Our churches share deep historical and spiritual connections rooted in the Wesleyan tradition. Across the Pacific, our peoples have been united through faith, worship, mission, and family ties. Many Tongan members have enriched the life of our Church in Aotearoa, contributing their gifts, leadership, culture, and unwavering commitment to Christ.

This anniversary also provides an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing the Church today. The world has changed dramatically over the past two hundred years. Communities are navigating rapid social, economic, technological, and environmental change. Young people face new pressures and questions about identity, belonging, and purpose. The impacts of climate change continue to affect Pacific nations, while global uncertainty presents ongoing challenges for communities and churches alike.

Yet the message of Christ remains as relevant and transformative today as it was when it first arrived on Tongan shores. The call to love God and neighbour, to seek justice, to care for creation, and to proclaim the hope of the Gospel continues to guide the Church's mission. We honour the legacy we have inherited by renewing our commitment to God's mission in the world. We are called to nurture the faith of our young people, strengthen our communities, deepen our discipleship, and respond faithfully to the needs of our time. As churches throughout the Pacific continue to face emerging challenges, our shared heritage provides a strong foundation for collaboration, mutual support, and faithful witness. I offer sincere thanks to the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga for its leadership, ministry, and enduring witness to the Gospel. May God richly bless the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, the Kingdom of Tonga, and all who gather to celebrate this historic anniversary.



New Chapter in CMM's Bicultural Journey

Earlier this year, Jared Riwai Couch joined Christchurch Methodist Mission (CMM) as its first Pou Manukura, marking a significant milestone in CMM's bicultural journey.

For Jared, its meaning is clear. "Given the current political climate in Aotearoa, the appointment of a Pou Manukura is both very brave and incredibly powerful," he says. It is, in his view, a direct expression of the Mission's values: "challenging injustice and working for social transformation." It is also a recognition of whakapapa, identity, and responsibility.

"The appointment of a Pou Manukura has massive significance in realising who we are as a Mission at the very foundation. This is to navigate our bicultural identity and to stand alongside our Te Tiriti responsibilities with balanced perspectives."

When Jared first saw the job advertised, the title itself caught his attention. "I saw the title as aspirational and something to strive towards," he recalls. To him, the meaning of Pou Manukura is "something unattainable but a challenge I accept."

An emphasis on collective movement, on we, sits at the heart of his leadership approach that blends vision with grounded relational practice. He recalls advice from his father while coaching rugby: "Son, when you pack down for the scrum always look up and scan where you are on the field and where your opponents are. This will help you know what defence lines you should run or what plays you can make." For Jared, leadership requires both "pushing with the pack" and the ability to "plan two or three plays ahead."

His early actions as Pou Manukura were shaped by deep ancestral connections between Te Hāhi o Weteriana and Rehua Marae. He speaks of his tupuna – Te Koti Te Rato, Rev Wera Couch, George Couch, Hinerua Couch, Te Kiato Riwai, and his grandfather Ben – whose actions helped build the foundation of that relationship and have set the tone for his work at CMM.

For Jared, embedding tikanga Māori is not abstract. It must be visible, audible, and lived. "That it is obvious to anyone who engages with CMM by phone, email, a job interview or simply walking into a reception area that tikanga Māori is seen, heard, loved and lived in the organisation."

Supporting staff to grow cultural capability will require "setting systems and programmes that support our kaimahi, building and strengthening relationships that have direct cultural impact for staff development," he says. Looking ahead, Jared envisions WesleyCare as "the preferred provider for Kaumātua Māori outside of whānau centred support."

He sees opportunities for flourishing partnerships with marae and Māori social services, a name change and rebrand that genuinely reflects CMM's values and biculturalism, and consistent practice of tikanga across staff welcomes, interviews, and organisational spaces.



Building Bridges of Peace

Rev Sooyong Han

A commemorative ceremony at the Korean War Memorial at Dove-Myer Robinson Park in Parnell, Auckland on 25 June 2026 became a powerful symbol of unity, remembrance, and enduring faith.

The Korean Veterans Association (KVA) New Zealand Branch hosted a large-

scale commemorative ceremony to mark the 76th anniversary of the Korean War. Joined by the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Auckland, the New Zealand Returned and Services' Association (RSA), and 'K-Force Remember', the event highlighted the deepening relationship between the local Korean community and the Methodist Church of New Zealand.

A United Community Serving in Gratitude

The congregation of the Korean Parish of the Northern Synod arrived early to serve the attendees in a humble act of service that was a heartfelt expression of gratitude for the 4,000 New Zealanders who served during the Korean War. The Korean Parish is a newly formed, vibrant congregation born from the union of two Korean communities; Dream Church and Open Door Church. As the two communities become one united family, the parish serves as a vital bridge with the New Zealand Methodist Church.

Rev Uesifili Unasa, Superintendent of the Northern Synod was invited by the Korean Parish to represent MCNZ, participating in the wreath-laying and delivering a moving closing prayer. His presence resonated deeply with the Korean community, serving as a powerful testament to the Church's commitment to peace, reconciliation, and cross-cultural fellowship.

Korean War veteran Daniel Herlihy was a special guest. His attendance brought profound emotion to the gathering, serving as a living reminder that the sacrifices of the Kiwi forces are not a "Forgotten War," but a vibrant memory cherished today.

Deacon Hee-joong Yang of the Korean Parish, acting in his capacity as the President of the KVA NZ Branch, delivered a moving address. He reaffirmed that the warm friendship and noble sacrifices of the New Zealand forces will never be forgotten. Consul General Hong-gi Kim also expressed deep respect and gratitude to the veterans and their families, noting that the prosperous South Korea of today is built upon that very foundation of sacrifice.

Passing the Torch of Peace

The commemoration successfully bridged generations. A moving rendition of Amazing Grace by student Joshua Kim brought many to tears as his clear, earnest voice carried a message of hope. In addition, student Ye-won Ham, prizewinner of the Korean War essay contest, read her winning piece. Her sincere words about the tragedy of war, the preciousness of peace, and heartfelt gratitude to the Kiwi veterans drew warm applause. Through acts of service, shared prayers, and the blending of generations, the Korean Parish and the Northern Synod demonstrated that the Church remains a vital bridge of peace, honoring the past while walking together toward a unified future in Christ.



Doing Church Differently

A Messy Church training programme led by Lucy Moore, founder of Messy Church UK, has transformed St Paul's Anglican-Methodist Co-operating Church and its Putāruru community. Mary Addison, Messy Ministries founder and lay leader, explains.

We are a very small financially struggling rural parish with a traditional Sunday 10am morning service. We are unable to afford a minister but for the last three years Parish Council has employed a Community Ministries Assistant Leader for 20 hours a week to help with the ministries that have arisen from us doing church differently.

We started Messy Church about 12 years ago and in we have never asked for a koha for any of our programmes. We have a special bank account called SEEDS for these ministries and each year donations ranging from \$4,000 to \$6,000 have come into the account from various sources. This money, donated mainly from outside our community, funds all our Messy Church ministries. It is a wonderful witness of God's provision and blessing.

Messy Church is an international, interdenominational way of doing church differently. It is called Messy Church because life is messy these days and is not straight forward. Currently more than 4,000 churches in over 30 countries run the programme. Wherever it is run it has the same core values. It

- is Christ Centred
- offers Hospitality
- is All Age
- has a Celebration Time
- is Creative.

Connecting with Community

Those values underpin all the messy ministries we offer at St Paul's. Messy Church is a congregation. It is not about increasing a Sunday congregation. Messy Church has grown several ministries over the years, allowing us to connect with our local community, including vulnerable people who would not normally attend traditional church services.

Every six weeks or so, on a Saturday from 4.00pm to 6.00pm, our Messy Church team of helpers- from church and from our local community - provide a sit-down meal for everyone who turns up. Typically, 40-70 people attend. Every Wednesday morning, a Messy Church Cooking programme offers hospitality and cooking skills to our local residential mental health adults. About 20 people attend each week, along with their support staff. For five years we have run an after-school literacy support group for vulnerable children called Messy School.

Fun, Food & Faith (Sunday School rebranded) in our church lounge on Sunday morning is for children and their parents, and other vulnerable adults who aren't comfortable in church. It is a good stepping stone to inviting Messy Church attendees to regular church. We also offer boxes of free groceries to vulnerable members of our community from our Messy Church Grocery Support Ministry. About five years ago we connected with a Tokoroa Charity called Halo. They are part of the National Food

Network and provide us with a carload of groceries each week. I refer to the groceries as Lucky Dip offerings as we never know what we will be given.

We are blessed to be able to give out hundreds of dollars' worth of groceries each week to people in need. This allows us to establish a pastoral connection with more than 30 families a fortnight, the majority connected through Messy Church. People don't need to belong to our church to receive groceries, but we include an invitation to attend our next Messy Church in each box given away.

We facilitate Advocacy Support with local professionals, agencies and organisations. We don't try to solve problems but offer connections that may help. We will attend Court, lawyers' meetings, doctors' appointments, Oranga Tamariki meetings, Family Court hearings, probation, and school meetings if there is a need. We are also able to offer financial help towards school camp fees, doctor's costs, uniforms, driving lesson fees and other urgent and unexpected expenses that may arise. We don't give out cash but will pay at the source when financial help is required.

We are often offered household items to give away (washing machines, beds, bedding etc) and through our Messy Church Furniture Ministries we send out texts to families asking if they know of anyone in need of the items we are offering. Connecting donors directly with recipients' saves double handling goods, and avoids storage issues.

Through our Messy Church Christmas Gift Ministry, we give away more than 100 Christmas gifts bags valued at approximately \$50 each, purchased from our SEEDS account and from donations from the wider community. For some of our Mental Health adults these are the only gifts they receive. We also give gift bags to vulnerable children we have connected with through our programmes during the year. We are extremely well supported by St Andrews Anglican Parish in Cambridge.



These ministries have grown and been blessed by God because we stepped out in faith and did church differently. Since starting Messy Church, we estimate we have given about \$100,000 - in cash, groceries and household goods - to our local community.



CARTOON



Jim's Cartoon.

Brendan Boughen

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



Reimagining Wesley College: A Story of Renewal, Achievement and Hope

For more than 180 years, Wesley College has been transforming lives through faith, learning and service. It looks to the future with confidence, vision and hope, says Principal Dr Brian Evans.

Generations of students from New Zealand and across the Pacific have passed through its gates,

carrying with them the values, opportunities and sense of purpose that have long defined the College. Like any great institution, Wesley has faced its share of challenges. Yet those challenges have not diminished the College. Instead, they have strengthened its resolve, sharpened its focus and inspired a renewed vision for the future.

Today, Wesley stands at an exciting point in its history. Supported by a loyal community of students, families, alumni, churches and friends, the College continues to attract families who value its Christian foundation, culture of care and commitment to helping young people succeed. This is not a story about preserving the past. It is a story about building the future.

A recent Special Character Review affirmed that Wesley's Methodist identity is authentic, visible and deeply valued, confirming that the College's core values continue to guide its direction. The report noted:

"The central finding is that Wesley has a genuine, visible and valued Methodist Special Character, seen in Chapel, Life and Faith, prayer, singing, pastoral care, inclusion, Kairangi values, cultural belonging, and the way many students are known and supported by staff. Students and families spoke strongly about belonging, care, faith, humility, service and Wesley as family".

The report went on to say: *"At the heart of Wesley lies a simple belief: every young person is created with purpose, potential and promise. Guided by its motto, Fide, Litteris, Labore (Faith, Learning and Hard Work), the College remains committed to developing the whole person, nurturing academic achievement alongside character, leadership and service".*

In recent years, Wesley has undertaken a significant cultural renewal. Leadership, systems and expectations have been strengthened, with safeguarding, accountability and student wellbeing placed at the centre of decision-making. Difficult decisions, including the temporary closure of boarding facilities, demonstrated a willingness to prioritise student welfare and long-term success over short-term convenience.

The term 'Cultural Renovation' was intentionally adopted. Keeping the best of our foundations - Christian faith, service, respect, compassion and community remain central to everyday life, but changing what needed to change. The results of this renewal are increasingly evident across the school. Student attendance remains strong at a time when many schools are experiencing significant challenges in this area. Engagement, belonging and participation continue to grow as students feel connected, supported and challenged to succeed.

Academic achievement tells an equally compelling story. Between 2021 and 2025, Wesley recorded steady improvements in NCEA success rates, highlighted by an outstanding 88 percent pass rate at NCEA Level 2 in 2025, well above the national average.

Particularly encouraging are the exceptional outcomes achieved by Māori and Pasifika students. In 2025, Māori learners attained a 93 percent Level 2 pass rate and an 85 percent pass rate at Level 3, significantly exceeding national benchmarks. Pasifika students also achieved outstanding results, with an 85 percent pass rate at Level 2. These achievements reflect the power of high expectations, strong relationships and a learning environment where students feel valued and supported.

Success extends across the entire school community and reinforce Wesley's commitment to creating opportunities for every student to excel, be it through a diverse range of cultural groups, music, drama, arts and sports.

The College's academic progress is being built from the ground up. Investment in literacy, numeracy and targeted support programmes, including Foundation Studies and small-group interventions, is strengthening learning foundations and creating pathways for future success. Wesley's focus is not simply on improving qualifications but on equipping young people with the skills, confidence and resilience needed for life.

Looking ahead, Wesley remains committed to continuous improvement. New initiatives reinforce the College's belief that education is about more than academic achievement alone. It is about helping students explore purpose, identity, leadership and service while preparing them for future study, careers and meaningful contribution to society.

This spirit of renewal now points to an important next step: the potential of the redevelopment of the Wesley campus that has been in plans for over a decade. More than a construction project, redevelopment is a visible expression of confidence in the future. Now that the culture, leadership and educational outcomes of the College have been transformed, the physical environment must reflect that progress.

The vision includes modern learning environments, enhanced community facilities and the possibility of a complete redevelopment of boarding accommodation into safe, contemporary and well-managed spaces where students can thrive. Facilities will provide an environment that matches the quality of the education, care and opportunities already being delivered.

Buildings tell stories. The current campus reflects much of Wesley's proud past. A renewed campus can reflect its future. Most importantly, redevelopment would send a clear message: Wesley College is not simply recovering from challenges. It is actively creating its future. With strong enrolments, improving academic outcomes, a vibrant faith-based identity and unwavering community support, the foundations for success are already in place.

Wesley College is writing a new chapter, one shaped by faith, courage, achievement and ambition. The evidence of progress is clear in its strengthened culture, affirmed special character, rising achievement and the lives of young people being transformed every day. The story of Wesley has always been about people, purpose and possibility. As the College looks to the future, it does so with confidence, vision and hope, believing that its best years are still ahead.



Annie Schnackenberg; A Methodist Legacy to Lifewise

Ann-Marie Searchfield Lifewise

Annie Schnackenberg holds a special place in MCNZ history. Her legacy influences the work of MMN and Lifewise today.

It is easy to become focused on the urgent challenges of today: homelessness, poverty, social isolation, addiction, family violence and the

struggle for dignity among those pushed to the margins. Just meters from the Mission's new offices in Symonds Street lies the final resting place of Annie Jane Schnackenberg, one of the most remarkable figures in NZ Methodist history. Her life offers a powerful reminder that the work we do today stands in a long tradition of Methodist service, advocacy and hope.

Annie Allen arrived in NZ with her family in 1861 and almost immediately responded to a call to serve at the Wesleyan mission station at Kāwhia. The journey took weeks by bullock dray, canoe and foot, but she accepted the challenge and dedicated herself to teaching, community building and supporting Māori communities alongside Methodist missionary Rev Cort Henry Schnackenberg, whom she later married. Beyond teaching, she helped run the mission, preached, managed accounts, maintained gardens to support the community and taught practical life skills to young women.

Her ministry was grounded in relationships, respect and a commitment to walking alongside people. Historical accounts note the strong relationships the Schnackenberg's developed with local Māori communities and their efforts to support people through periods of enormous social change and disruption. The NZ Annie encountered in her time was grappling with many of the same forces that challenge us today. Communities were experiencing displacement, poverty, inequality and the social harms associated with alcohol misuse. Rapid social, economic and political change left many people vulnerable and excluded. Annie recognised that Christian faith required more than charity alone; it required advocacy, education and practical support.

After returning to Auckland, her leadership at Pitt Street Methodist Church became an important part of her Methodist work, connecting her faith, church service and public advocacy. She became a founding member of the NZ Women's Christian Temperance Union (NZWCTU), later serving as its national president from 1892 to 1901. In that role she was part of the organised, persistent movement that helped secure women's right to vote in 1893. Her suffrage work grew from the same conviction that people most affected by social decisions should have dignity, agency and a voice in shaping the society around them.

This aspect of Annie's legacy deserves particular attention. The suffrage campaign was one of the most significant social justice movements in NZ's history, and Methodist women were active within it. Through the NZWCTU, women organised meetings, gathered signatures, built public support and challenged the assumption that political life belonged only to men. Annie's leadership placed her within a generation of women who understood that the vote was not simply a political symbol; it was a practical tool for protecting families, influencing law and policy, and ensuring women could speak

into the conditions affecting their own lives and communities. Her advocacy reminds us that social reform is often carried by ordinary people who organise patiently, speak with moral clarity and refuse to accept exclusion as inevitable.

This connection between compassionate service and social justice remains at the heart of the MMN today. In many ways, Lifewise reflects Annie's legacy in contemporary Central Auckland. Like Annie, Lifewise seeks to walk alongside people rather than simply provide services to them. Annie's work was based on relationships, trust and a commitment to supporting people to navigate difficult circumstances. Today's programmes, and support services continue that relational approach, meeting people where they are and supporting them towards their own goals and aspirations.

Annie also understood that practical care and social change belong together. Today, Lifewise follows this same tradition. Alongside delivering services, the organisation advocates for solutions to homelessness, poverty, housing insecurity and social exclusion, and continues to elevate the voices of people too often left out of public decision-making. The belief that faith should inspire both compassion and social justice is as relevant today as it was in Annie's time.

A further connection lies in a shared belief in the dignity and potential of every person. Annie's work in education and community development was grounded in the conviction that people should be supported to flourish and participate fully in society. Lifewise expresses this belief through strengths-based practice, lived-experience leadership, whānau-centred approaches and a commitment to ensuring people are not defined by their circumstances but recognised for their strengths and aspirations.

There are echoes, too, in Annie's commitment to working alongside Māori communities. Historical accounts describe the respect and relationships the Schnackenberg developed with Māori during periods of significant change and upheaval. While our understanding and practice have evolved considerably, Lifewise's commitment to Te Tiriti partnership, Māori leadership and culturally responsive services reflects an ongoing Methodist commitment to working in genuine partnership with tangata whenua.

Perhaps the strongest connection is that neither Annie nor Lifewise sees mission as something confined to church walls. Annie expressed her faith through education, welfare, advocacy and community development. Today, MMN expresses that same faith through housing, mental health and addiction services, family support, community development and advocacy. The methods have changed, but the mission remains recognisably the same: standing alongside those experiencing hardship and working for a society where everyone can flourish.

When Lifewise helps someone move from the street into permanent housing, stands beside a whānau in crisis, advocates for better public policy, or creates opportunities for people to belong and thrive, it continues a tradition that Annie Schnackenberg would recognise. Her resting place near the Mission Northern's new Symonds Street and Karangahape Road offices is more than a historical footnote.

It is a reminder that today's work is part of a much longer story—one in which each generation inherits the courage and compassion of those who came before and is called to carry that mission forward in its own time. In doing so, we honour not only Annie Schnackenberg's memory, but the enduring Methodist commitment to hope, dignity, justice and belonging.



Mustard Seed Sinoti Samoa Gisborne Parish Beach Clean-Up Siniva Isaia

The Mustard Seed Sinoti Samoa Gisborne Parish and Kingdom Kidz

Sunday School came together for a meaningful day of environmental education, and family fellowship at Oneroa Beach, Te Tairāwhiti Gisborne.

The initiative was part of Sinoti Samoa's Climate Change Response – *Rekindle the Vā of Papatūānuku*. The day began with church members, children, youth, and families participating in a community beach clean-up, collecting rubbish and helping restore the natural beauty of one of Gisborne's treasured coastlines. The activity was more than simply picking up litter - it was an opportunity to teach our children about their responsibility as caretakers of God's creation.

Throughout the clean-up, our tamariki learned how litter can have devastating impacts on marine life, birds, and other wildlife. They discovered that plastic waste and rubbish left on our beaches can enter the ocean, harming fish and other species that our communities depend on. More importantly, they began to understand that the choices we make today will shape the environment that future generations inherit.

This initiative reflects Sinoti Samoa's commitment to *Rekindle the Vā of Papatūānuku*—strengthening our sacred relationship with the land, sea, and all of creation. Caring for the environment is an expression of our faith, culture, and responsibility to future generations.

Following the beach clean-up, the group visited Kiwa Pools, where they engaged in environmental learning activities, including watching an educational video exploring the importance of the Three Rs – Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. Through fun discussions and interactive learning, everyone gained practical knowledge about how small everyday actions can make a significant difference in reducing waste and protecting our environment.

The day concluded with a well-deserved time of recreation and fellowship. Families enjoyed a swim at Kiwa Pools before sharing pizzas, strengthening relationships and celebrating a successful day of serving both the community and Papatūānuku.

The smiles on the faces of our children throughout the day were a reminder that environmental education can be both enjoyable and impactful. By involving young people in hands-on experiences, we are nurturing a generation that understands the importance of protecting our natural world and caring for the precious resources God has entrusted to us.

The Mustard Seed Sinoti Samoa Gisborne Parish extends heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers, parents, youth, Sunday School leaders, and children who participated. Together, we demonstrated that small acts of service can make a lasting difference when a community unites with a shared purpose.



Care & Compassion Count for Much More Than 5-Star Facilities



Rev Dr Susan Thompson, Chaplain Tamahere

The aged care business is booming; new retirement villages and care homes are being built in every town and city. Many are very upmarket and advertise themselves as providing a "five star experience".

Since working at Tamahere I've learnt that the most important thing about a care home isn't how flash or upmarket it is. The quality of the loving care residents receive from staff is the most important thing. Tamahere was built in the 1960s and although its facilities have been in a continual state of improvement, it still has the feel of an older building. However, we have exceptional staff who offer our residents high quality loving care.

That includes all of our kaimahi from the cleaners to the chief executive: our nurses, caregivers, gardeners, therapists, cooks, drivers, laundry workers, maintenance men, activities coordinators and office staff. They all treat our residents and their families with respect and compassion. I often find our driver sitting with residents, listening to their stories; the general manager making coffee for someone who is confused; our diversional therapists offering hugs and comfort when residents are feeling sad; and caregivers giving residents Communion when they can't feed themselves. It's likely that none of these things are a part of their job descriptions, but these acts of kindness are the "heart work" that all our staff do on a regular basis.

The writer Brian Doyle once wrote a prayer giving thanks for nurses, but to me its words apply equally to everyone working at Tamahere. In it he gave thanks for all "soothers and calmers and amusers ... they who are not saluted and celebrated and worshipped as they ought to be ... for it is they who have their holy hands on the brows and bruises of the broken and frightened ..." He gave awed thanks for "each and every one, glorious and lovely in their greens and blues and rainbow clothing; they who are [the love of God] in every tender touch and quiet friendly gentle murmured remark; they who are the best of us ... the clan of calm and the tribe of tender; and [we] bow in thanks for them. And so: amen."



CONTACT DETAILS

I welcome your feedback on content included in this publication.

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National Council of Women Prepare to Celebrate 130 years of History

The national representative to the National Council of Women of New Zealand for the Women's Missionary Fellowship, Rita Middleton shares the history and objectives of the organisation as celebrations for the 130th anniversary near.

In September 1893, New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote. This was largely the result of campaigning by a group of women in Christchurch, led by Kate Sheppard, who went on to become the first president of the National Council for Women of New Zealand. The Council held their first conference in April, 1896, in Christchurch. This year marks the 130th anniversary of the NCWNZ and the annual convention celebrating this occasion will be held on 12 and 13 September in Auckland.

Over the past 130 years, the NCWNZ has continued to advocate for social issues in NZ. In politics it is often one step forward and two steps back. I am sure this is how it felt for the women of NZ, when the current government passed the amendment to the Equal Pay Act in May 2025, immediately terminating the pay equity claims which were before the courts at that time.

In response, and in collaboration with other groups, the NCWNZ formed the People's Select Committee on the Equal Pay Amendment Act. The report that this committee generated was ignored by the current government but remains on record for politicians to consider when these issues are debated in the future.

In May 2025, anti-stalking legislation was enacted, after collaborative campaigning by NCWNZ and the Coalition for the Safety of Women and Children. While this represents a win, the organization is aware that there will need to be ongoing monitoring to ensure the legislation is applied.

In September 2025, a Gender Attitudes Survey was carried out. Results showed that there are persistent negative attitudes towards women, particularly among some minority groups. This is disappointing and affirms that there is a long way to go before New Zealand is truly a country where every citizen, of every gender, ethnicity or creed, is treated fairly.

I am honoured to represent WMF on the NCWNZ, giving a voice to women of faith in this important work. I look forward to attending the national conference in September, and to learning more about what is being done and what can be done in the future to protect women and children of this country and to provide a safe environment for all.