



Statistics Wānanga: Rethinking How the Church Tells Its Story

Rev. Tara Tautari, General Secretary

For many years the Church has collected statistics. A recent Statistics Wānanga considered an important question: do our current ways of reporting really reflect the life and mission of the Church today?

In late February, a small group gathered at Ōhope Marae near Whakatāne for a two-day wānanga to reflect on how Te Hāhi Weteriana

records, understands and shares information about the life of the Church.

Holding the wānanga on a marae shaped the whole tone of the gathering. The environment of whanaungatanga, hospitality and shared conversation reminded everyone that statistics are not just numbers. They are connected to people, culture and the stories we tell about who we are as a Church. Participants came from across the Connexion so that many different voices and experiences could shape the discussion.

Listening to Different Voices

The gathering included representatives from Te Taha Māori. Their presence was particularly important, as Te Taha Māori has not submitted statistical returns for some time. This highlighted the need for a reporting system that better reflects Māori ways of understanding community and belonging. Cultural synods were also represented, including Vahefonua Tonga and Sinoti Samoa, ensuring that Pacific perspectives were part of the conversation.

The realities of parish life were also represented, bringing insights from ministry in a large and diverse urban congregation. Safeguarding expertise was included as well, reminding the group that reporting must also reflect care, accountability and the protection of people.

Marama Hotere and I co-facilitated the wānanga, guiding the group through reflection, discussion and the development of new ideas.

The format of the wānanga allowed space for many different kinds of conversation. Participants moved between presentations, small group discussions, storytelling and theological reflection. The conversation began with questions about identity and inheritance. Participants were asked to reflect on a simple but powerful question:

What is one value or piece of wisdom you inherited from a previous generation and how has it shaped your life?

This helped ground the discussion in real experiences of faith and community. Bible study also shaped the conversation. Participants looked at the census described in the Book of Numbers and reflected on how counting people in Scripture was connected to identity and community organisation. At the same time, the group noted the limitations of the biblical census, especially the fact that women were not included in the official count. This raised an important question: who might be overlooked when we define community through statistics alone?

The discussion was balanced with reflection on the parable of the lost sheep which reminds us that every individual matters. Together these passages highlighted a key insight: statistics can tell us about the size of a community but the heart of the Gospel is the care of each person.

Several important themes emerged from the discussions.

First, the current statistical system reflects an older model of church life, focused mainly on formal membership, Sunday attendance and structured congregational activity. While these measures still matter, they no longer capture the full picture of ministry today.

Many ministries now happen through community partnerships, cultural networks, social services and digital engagement. These activities are often invisible in the current reporting system.

Second, the wānanga highlighted that the current framework does not always reflect the cultural realities of Māori and Pacific communities. Much of the life of these communities happens through relationships, gatherings and shared cultural practices, which do not fit easily into traditional statistical categories.

Participants also noted practical problems with the existing forms which do not always capture the diversity of the Church or recognise newer forms of ministry such as online worship.

The discussions revealed both common concerns and some differences. For many Tauwi congregations, the issue is that the current system does not capture the full range of ministry, especially mission work, digital engagement and community partnerships. For Te Taha Māori, the challenge is deeper. The current framework reflects particular assumptions about how information should be collected and recorded. Māori communities often hold knowledge through oral traditions, relationships and shared memory rather than written forms or numerical reports. Any new system therefore needs to recognise these different ways of understanding community life.

Despite these differences, there was a strong sense of shared purpose. Participants expressed a desire to develop a reporting approach that better reflects the spiritual, relational and missional life of the Church.

Several ideas began to emerge:

- Moving toward a purpose-driven reporting framework that combines statistics with storytelling.
- Organising reporting around key aspects of church life such as spiritual formation, relationships, leadership development, community engagement and stewardship.
- Ensuring that any new framework is biculturally grounded, recognising both Māori and Tauwi ways of understanding community.

One image that resonated strongly during the wānanga was that of the waka hourua, the double-hulled voyaging canoe.

Just as the two hulls of a waka hourua travel together in balance, the life of the Church is shaped by the partnership between Te Taha Māori and Tauwi. The Church can be understood as a people journeying together across changing seas, guided by faith, ancestral wisdom and hope for the future.

The Journey Continues

The Statistics Wānanga concluded with a sense that this work is only just beginning. The ideas emerging from the gathering will now be shared with Synods and Hui Pōari for further reflection and feedback.

After this consultation, a revised framework will be presented to Conference later in the year. Participants left Ōhope encouraged. Like the waka hourua that guided the conversation, the Church continues its journey together, carrying the wisdom of the past while navigating the opportunities and challenges ahead.



Southern Eastercamp: Three Decades of Reaching Young People for Jesus

Hannah Cossey, Leadership Coach,
Canterbury Youth Services

In 1996 Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian youth ministries came together to run a camp for 360 Canterbury teenagers to hear the Easter message. This Easter some 3000 youth will gather to celebrate.

Southern Eastercamp had its genesis 30 years ago. What began as a collaborative

effort between a few denominations has grown into something much larger. In 2026, it is still going strong, with over 3,000 campers attending across 80 different youth groups, representing a mix of 20 denominations and independent movements. Most youth groups come from local churches in Canterbury; however, a number make the journey from the Marlborough and Tasman regions, while others travel from as far south as Dunedin. This diversity reflects the unity that Eastercamp continues to foster year after year.

Despite various challenges over the decades, Eastercamp has remained an annual pilgrimage for youth ministries. The only exceptions were two years when it was cancelled due to nationwide gathering restrictions during COVID-19. Aside from those disruptions, it has become a consistent rhythm in the life of many churches; something leaders and young people plan for, fundraise toward and anticipate each year.

Canterbury Youth Services (CYS) is the organisation that facilitates this much-loved event. It is a trust set up to serve local churches and support them in running healthy youth ministries. CYS does not run youth ministry directly; instead, its heart is to see local churches flourish in connecting young people with Jesus and discipling them in a way that sustains lifelong faith. It also creates opportunities for youth groups and leaders to gather across denominational lines, expressing unity and worshipping together as one church.

CYS manages the logistics of running Eastercamp, allowing youth leaders to focus on their young people. The camp is intentionally structured so that young people register through a local youth ministry and camp together. During main meetings, groups sit together, and when a young person responds to a message, it is their own leaders who walk with them, pray with them and help them process that response. In this way, significant faith moments remain anchored in the local church. CYS seeks to ensure that what happens at camp strengthens, not replaces, the role of the church in a young person's life.

A Pilgrimage

Eastercamp truly feels like a pilgrimage. It takes effort for youth groups to prepare, travel and set up camp in Canterbury's autumn conditions but this shared experience adds to its meaning. Each day follows a familiar rhythm. Mornings begin with the sounds of *Jump Jam* for early risers and the activity of neighbouring groups gathering. After breakfast, campers make their way across Spencer Park to the Big Top (the largest marquee tent in the country) where everyone gathers twice daily.

Each morning session begins with Scripture, orienting young people within the Easter story. The Satellite Band leads worship, followed by a speaker who presents the message of Jesus' death and resurrection in a way that is both accessible and relevant, helping young people understand what it means to follow Jesus today.

After the morning gathering, youth groups return to their campsites for small group discussions. These moments allow leaders to unpack the message more personally, giving young people space to ask questions, share reflections and explore how faith connects to their lives. Leaders can tailor these conversations to where their group is at spiritually.

Each day before lunch, youth leaders gather for updates and prayer. It is encouraging to see so many adults from different churches united by a shared mission: bringing young people in their local neighbourhoods to Jesus. While each group serves its own context, together they reflect the wider work of God through the church.

The afternoons feel like a festival—full of energy, creativity and fun in a safe environment. There are carnival rides, food trucks, sports competitions, and a small stage hosting activities such as band competitions and spelling bees. Spaces are available for both high-energy games like jelly ball and quieter activities like LEGO. Optional experiences include surfing lessons or time at the high ropes course at Adrenaline Park nearby. Later in the afternoon, workshops provide opportunities to explore specific topics in greater depth.

As the day winds down, groups share dinner before preparing for the evening gathering in the Big Top. The media team presents a highlight video from the past 24 hours. The evening meetings centre on worship and the gospel, often becoming deeply significant moments. Many young people choose to stay afterwards for prayer and reflection rather than joining the social activities in the camp village.

Behind the scenes, numerous people serve to make Eastercamp possible. Speakers, workshop facilitators, MCs, the Satellite Band and volunteers come from churches across the region and beyond, giving up their Easter weekend to help young people encounter Jesus. A dedicated Prayer Tent, hosted by the Prayer Collective Christchurch, offers a space for reflection, worship and intercession, with people committed to covering the event in prayer.

Music plays an important role in shaping experiences. The Satellite Band writes original songs each year, creating worship that connects with young people while remaining theologically grounded. One standout is *JOY*, which has become an anthem sung annually since 2019.

As the cultural context surrounding young people continues to shift, Eastercamp remains consistent in its focus: telling the Easter story and pointing young people to Jesus. In recent years, many adult Christians have felt the weight of cultural change, seeing prominent leaders fall, shifts away from Christian values and declining church attendance. In this context, Eastercamp stands as a beacon of hope. Each year, thousands of young people respond to the message of Jesus. For some, it is a first step toward faith; for others, it marks a deeper commitment.

There is a clear hunger among young people for truth and meaning. Many are searching for peace in an anxious world and purpose in a culture that often fosters comparison and discouragement. At Eastercamp, they encounter a message that speaks directly to these needs. This is seen in moments such as young people lining up at the Prayer Tent after evening meetings, or the quiet stillness that fills the Big Top as they reflect together. These moments point to something deeper, a generation discovering that following God brings life, hope and stronger communities.

Eastercamp is a place where Jesus is at the centre, young people are the priority and unity is the blessing. It reminds the wider church that God is at work among the next generation, with faith continuing to grow year after year.



Imagination and Spirituality

Rev Darryn R Hickling, Rolleston Initiative

In Canterbury the Rolleston Initiative is building community and fostering meaningful connection both through face-to-face engagement and online platforms.

Origins and Background

Approximately five years ago, a growing sense of restlessness and a period of study leave converged to create an unexpected opportunity. Over four weeks, I undertook research, conducted interviews and sought feedback from parishes throughout the motu. The aim was to learn from those with lived experience of fresh expressions of faith, alternative church models and new ministry initiatives. Through prayer, conversation, research and discernment and with the support of the Synod Te Waipounamu, Imagination and Spirituality formally commenced in 2025.

Why Rolleston?

Rolleston is the fastest-growing area in New Zealand. With approximately 17 churches already present, the question of capacity is understandable. However, consider the analogy of an ice cream shop: while all flavours are ice cream, they offer distinctly different experiences. The Methodist Church has an opportunity to offer its own distinctive flavour of faith expression. Methodism brings an emphasis on grace, social action and love that is both timeless and relevant. The goal is not to replicate what already exists but to offer something genuinely different.

At our last Conference, we explored the theme of 'God's Aroha; A Call to Sacred Transformation.' This raises important questions: What does transformation look like in practice? What will be meaningfully different about this expression of church?

Imagination and Spirituality Evolving Organically

For many parishes, the three major financial burdens are insurance, maintenance and stipends. Considerable time and energy in parish councils and property committees are devoted to sustaining existing infrastructure. As ageing congregations, who have historically been the primary financial contributors, transition out of active giving through retirement, relocation or death, the harsh reality is that costs continue to rise while the pool of contributors continues to shrink. This is a challenge the Palagi church faces, is navigating and will continue to confront.

Imagination and Spirituality was established without a building of its own. Our primary gathering space is The Garage, a room within the Rolleston Community Centre. We meet on the third Thursday of each month, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., a deliberate choice that avoids direct competition with Sunday morning or evening worship gatherings.

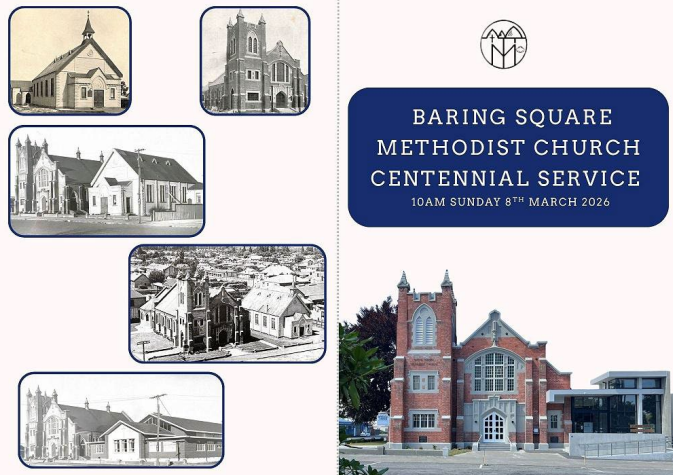
Our group is small in number and that is intentional. Gatherings will evolve to become increasingly experiential in nature: using creativity and imagination to write poetry, draw, reflect, colour and explore themes together. The space is designed to be inclusive, Te Tiriti-honouring, contemplative, socially engaged and welcoming of progressive theological perspectives.

Imagination and Spirituality has emerged organically and will continue to develop in that manner. A new venture has taken shape; the waka is being moved out from the familiar waters of traditional parish life into less charted territory. In a very real sense, it is 'back to the future,' recalling that there was not one single model of church in the New Testament.



Baring Square Celebrate Centennial

Judith Crozier



Past and present church leaders and parishioners came together for the Baring Square Methodist Church Centennial celebrations on Sunday 8 March 2026.

Rev Peter Taylor, MCNZ Immediate Past President and former minister at Baring Square Methodist Church, led the service. Rev Peter was the Minister when the earthquake occurred on 4 September 2010. The event meant closing the doors of the church until February 2023 when the restored and modernised building reopened. During that 13 year closure, services were held in the adjacent lounge.

The President of the Methodist Church of NZ, Te Aroha Rountree and Vice President, Rev Peter Norman, participated in the centennial celebration service with musical accompaniment provided by organist Cathy Ashford and soloist Ann Woodham.

A display of memorabilia set out in the Tinwald Room at the back of the Church was popular as attendees happily reminisced about the "good old days" over photos from the recent and distant past. The Willowby stained glass windows are now framed and lit up in the Willowby Room and the signed picture from the reopening three years ago hangs in the entry foyer.



From Box to Boutique

Phaedra Fusitu'a



A 'give and take' box at St John's Methodist Parish, Hamilton started as a simple way for members of the community to take what they needed and leave whatever they liked, has evolved into a community asset.

We were grateful for the input of Zona Havea, a member of the church, who helped us solve issues of dumping. We now have items on offer well displayed and encourage community donations during opening

hours when the deliveries can be monitored. Thanks to the many hands that helped to improve and grow the mission project, we have morphed to be a 'give and take boutique'.

Many donations come in daily - clothing, appliances, bedding, bread, fruit, vegetables and toys - and at times we are overwhelmed. We serve tea and coffee and people come from all over to enjoy fellowship as well as to select food, clothing and / or household items from the many wonderful donations we receive. Our small but meaningful project has been a testament to the richness God has bestowed on each of us.

This project has taught us an invaluable lesson, that although we do not have an abundance of money to do His work, we always have an abundance of time. Time can be spent helping our brothers and sisters in Christ, for that is what He asked of us.



Hinewai Visit a Shared Spiritual Experience

Natalie Henderson

In October a group of parishioners from Durham Street Methodist Church stayed at Hinewai Reserve, a stunning area of conservation on the Banks Peninsula, as a part of the Season of Creation.



Hinewai is a private reserve that began in 1987 by the Maurice White Native Forest Trust. The vision was ecological restoration, and in the beginning the method of restoration employed by the manager of the 109 hectare block, Hugh Wilson, was considered highly unusual and controversial.

Hugh, an esteemed botanist, was against planting seedlings to regenerate the forest. Instead, he opted to let the gorse on paddocks and cleared land to go unchecked. The theory was that the seeds of the original forest were in the soil and the gorse would act as a natural nursery as these seeds spring to life. As the natives grow, they starve the gorse of light, leaving it to die back. 39 years on and Hinewai spans 1600 hectares. The native forest is incredible, with diverse native fauna abounding. Although it is a private trust, the area with its extensive track network and an accommodation hut, is open for the public to use.

Our parish group included 14 people of all ages, genders, and abilities – some came for a day trip and others stayed overnight in the well-equipped hut complete with a fridge, an oven, hot running water and showers. For some the shared facilities and hut sleepover was a new experience. Others more used to tramping considered the hut “flash as”.

Highlights included the amazing outlook from the hut – over the native regenerating bush down to the coastline and sea - the native birdsong, relaxed social time, delicious food, and exploring the tracks. On Sunday, at the same time the church service was going ahead in Christchurch, we walked to an old and mighty Totara tree, where we all sat either in silence or quietly chatting. There was an incredible spiritual sense for some who felt the tree gave peace, momentarily taking burdens leaving them feeling lighter. Others commented of feeling as though they were lying safely on a mum’s lap. This was no surprise to those who spend time in the outdoors, as their sense is that Papatūānuku is a safe place to release life’s worries, just ‘be’ and experience awe.

The shared experience has strengthened relationships. Positive anecdotes included people walking when they didn't think they could and confidence building to go again on their own. Those are the stories I live for, the positive impact on mental health and quality of life.

We were blessed to be given a Rekindle the Vā of Papatūānuku grant from the Methodist Church to help fund this trip.



Does it matter if it's true?

Andrew Gamman

Preachers like to illustrate messages with engaging stories of interesting events and people... and rightly so. Increasingly though, people are fabricating stories, truths and quotes for their own purposes.

When I was younger, I had little hesitation passing on a good story that I had heard preached from the pulpit by one of my elders. Now I'm older and more cynical. Were all those stories true? Does it matter?

Sometimes it doesn't. Fictional stories from many sources, Aesop to Dr Seuss, can be useful to illustrate a point. So is an illustration introduced with the words, "The story is told..." acknowledging the source if known, but indicating that it is not a story about something that actually happened. Writing stories that are clearly fictional to set a theme can add interest.

The trouble is that, with the internet and social media, there are so many good stories circulating about real people that are totally fabricated. And we like to pass on those apt quotes. So does it matter that there is no record of St Francis of Assisi ever saying, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary"? And does it matter that nowhere in the writings of John Wesley will you find the famous quote, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can"? These quotes are in line with what we know of the lives and teaching of these famous Christian heroes.

From there it gets a bit more troublesome. Recently I heard, from ministers, two different accounts of the last words of Steve Jobs, founder of Apple. One was a good quote in which Jobs declared that in the long run business success and wealth are not the things of great value. As this was quite different from the previous "last words" quoted by the other minister, I did a fact check. It turns out that, according to Steve Jobs' sister's eulogy, and she was at his deathbed, his last words were, "Oh wow." Probably not a lot of use for a sermon illustration! What is happening is people are fabricating quotes for their own purposes.

An apt saying in a sermon can be attributed to Einstein and everyone will think it is wise. Lots of inspiring Christian quotes are attributed to him, even though he had no belief in a personal God! Fake quotes from Pope Leo and Pope Francis are liked and shared on social media every day. All this is in line with the worst of current political speak. The idea is that it doesn't matter whether it is true or not because, if we keep saying it, we will make our own truth.

But this does matter! If we can make stuff up and call it fact it puts a question mark over everything we say. Truth is still important. Before we retell the story or repost a quote, we can do a quick fact check.

My kids are digital natives. Their first thought when they read something on social media is, "That's not true". I'm older – more trusting and more gullible. It's only on second thoughts I ask Google or go to the Snopes fact-checker.



Easter – A Love Story for Our Times

Rev Uesifili Unasa

I recently received a request. To join a petition against the Coalition Government's intention to pass legislation allowing Police to move rough-sleepers on. I gladly signed it.

From time to time, the levers of power in this country speak a

strange moral language, one impatient with persons and fluent in categories rather than faces. It speaks of order while practicing cruelty. It names enemies while erasing faces.

We are living in such a time now. Just as we lived in the times of Bastion Point, Anti-Springbok tours and Dawn Raids. Such a time demands clarity from the church: lines drawn, principles defended, prophetic imagination. It also presses a more uncomfortable question: What kind of people are we becoming while this violence is normalised?

Since entering ministry in 1990, I have noticed the increasing Americanization of church and faith in most denominations, including our own. We are bewitched by urgency, efficiency, and visible results. In this, we can learn much from Jesus. His resistance to power never took forms of slogans or fist raised. Instead, he simply asked people, "what do you see?" Jesus practiced disciplined attention. When speed becomes our moral measure and fiscal prudence our truth, we lose the capacity to see one another.

What is increasingly being lost today is the moral practice of 'seeing'. The Christian faith insists that human dignity is never abstract. It is an encounter learned face to face, sustained by presence, and violated when bodies become problems to be managed rather than persons to be embraced, or worse, when humans become instruments of political power. When people are treated as threats to be contained rather than neighbours to be loved, violence does not announce itself loudly. Often it arrives calmly. Carrying paperwork. Follows procedure. Files reports.

There is the need to read scripture less as a storehouse of principles than as an apprenticeship into a way of life formed over time. A church response to vexed issues, seen this way, is not merely procedural. It is the discipline of a faith community that has resolved not to rush human life past its own dignity. For sure, when such discipline is absent in the life of the church, the harm is not confined to the rough sleepers or the marginalised or policy makers. Believers, friends, neighbours, families and society alike are formed by what they are permitted to do and what they learn to tolerate.

At the heart of the Easter story is the body of Jesus. The incarnation pronounces that bodies matter to God. Human bodies, vulnerable and irreducible, are not units to be managed and used but persons to be encountered. Pontius Pilate and the Empire had little patience for such claims. Its logic teaches that the security of some justifies the killing of others. Bodies become expendable and sacrificial for the sake of the nation. The Christian faith, however, cannot speak this way because it has been formed by a body that refused this logic. Divine love does not coerce. The kingdom does not arrive by crushing people into submission.

Government-sanctioned violence infects everyone it touches. Be it passive or aggressive. It trains us to accept outcomes without asking what they cost our souls. This is why the church cannot remain indifferent or talk casually about homelessness, dispossession or displacement, as though it is immune from it all. Such measures always have texture: they are enacted somewhere, by someone, upon someone. Church silence is not neutrality; it is permission.

We are all formed not only by what we profess in faith but also by what our bodies learn to tolerate. We learn to look away. To speak about suffering at a distance. To pray without interruption. To read headlines without allowing them to trouble our theology. In the end, the abstract becomes reality. Compassion becomes performative. Love becomes difficult.

I don't believe we are meant to amplify the anxieties of our age or to disguise the urgency in theological language. Rather, we are meant to manifest countercultural faithfulness. Tell the truth. Speak without spectacle. Refuse language that turns people into threats. Practice hospitality not as sentiment but as learned in bodies, enacted in shared life, sustained over time.

This Easter season is not the moment to discover a new mission of outrage. It is the moment to remember the old mission: to bear witness to God who, in Jesus, came to us in love so amazing so divine. In Jesus, our right has been taken away forever to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor.



CARTOON



Surely three crosses is enough?

Jim's Cartoon.

Brendan Boughen

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



AROUND THE CONNEXION



Gospel Choir Perform at Te Aroha Church

Robyn Brown, Parish Coordinator

When Te Aroha Co-operating Parish recognised that the church built in the 1930s was an earthquake risk and needed considerable work to bring it up to code, the parish was fortunate to have had resources enabling us to go ahead to have the necessary work undertaken. Repairs were completed in 2025.

As a Parish, we are keen to share our refurbished complex with the wider community so when one of our members suggested we invite the Hamilton Community Gospel Choir to perform for us, we did. We promoted the Sunday afternoon concert locally, inviting people to come and enjoy the music. No charge was made; people were invited to give a koha towards landscaping the outside areas that were damaged during the refurbishment. In lieu of providing the usual tea, coffee and biscuits we opted for cold drinks with cheese and fruit platters generously provided by our parish members. Beverages included a very appealing *Island Punch* made by our Tongan family. Both the concert and the refreshments were a great success and the generous koha given has enabled us to approach a local sculpture artist to create a centrepiece for our garden. We look forward to planning and hosting more events that enable us to share our place with others.



Easter Traditions Vary but Promise of Life is a Constant

Rev Shelley Walker, NZMWF Chaplain

Reflecting on Easter this year, I have been thinking about some of those traditions we follow. What does Easter mean for us?

Is it just a long weekend, a chance to spend some time with family or catch up on jobs around the house? I invited members of Devonport Methodist Church to share some of their family Easter traditions – perhaps not surprisingly, any of them featured eggs!

Growing up, Easter for me meant hot cross buns on Good Friday, chocolate eggs after church on Sunday and roast chicken for lunch. Chicken was a special occasion dish, and our hens always looked especially nervous around Christmas and Easter. One Easter - memorable for all the wrong reasons – occurred in April 1968 when the Lyttelton-Wellington ferry Wahine sank off the Wellington Heads.

So many of our Easter traditions have been imported from the northern hemisphere, and the imagery of daffodils, baby chicks and bunnies seem incongruous as we here in more southern climes are faced with falling leaves and shorter days. In our rural parishes, we frequently must set aside the austerity of Lent to celebrate the bounty of God's provision at Harvest Festival. For city churches whose harvest comes from the supermarket rather than fields and gardens, this timing is not crucial, but for those more closely connected to the land, there can be much soul-searching to determine when to hold this festival.

The difference between north and south was brought home to me on my first visit to the United Kingdom many years ago. On Easter Sunday I visited the Church of St Mary in the village of Prestbury near Cheltenham. I remember the interior being a riot of colour, yellow and green and white twining around the stone columns. Those traditional images of new life and new beginnings suddenly made sense. Spring, in all its glory, is resurrection indeed. Here, though, Spring is still a future hope, and we must journey through the long cold nights of Winter before we get there. An Easter in Autumn reminds us that the grain falls to the earth before it can burst into the abundance of next season's harvest, while at the same time reminding us that the harvest will come in its season.

The resurrection of Christ from the tomb on the morning of what we know as Easter Sunday is not a neat way of wrapping up the story and giving us a happy ending. It is foundational to our faith. It is that 'sure and certain hope' held out to us in the person of Christ Jesus of eternal life; of hope beyond death itself.

However you celebrate it, whatever traditions you choose to revisit with your family and friends, remember these things will form the memories of future telling. May your Easter journey in 2026 bring you to a place of joy and celebration. If your reality is still one of waiting in the darkness, may you be reassured of the promise of the coming Spring. Wherever you find yourself this year, be comforted by Jesus' assurance of life, in all its fullness.



Sinoti Celebrates New Candidates on a Journey of Transformation

Rev Suiva'aia Te'o



Sinoti Samoa rejoices in a significant milestone in our shared ministry: 11 candidates have begun their journey of formation as lay preachers in training.

At a time when the Church continues to discern how best to proclaim Christ in a changing world, it is deeply encouraging to witness men and women from across generations responding faithfully to God's call. These candidates — representing a diversity of age, gender, experience and vocation — gathered online for their first session, united by one clear purpose: to become ambassadors for Christ.

Their journey will extend over one and a half years, structured in three semesters of study followed by a final four-week Theology component. This formation process is not simply academic preparation; it is spiritual shaping. Lay preaching in the Wesleyan tradition has always been more than delivering sermons - it is about embodying the gospel, serving the community, and faithfully interpreting scripture within the life of the Church.

For Sinoti Samoa, this moment carries particular significance. As a people shaped by faith, migration, culture and community, we understand the power of the spoken Word - the preached Word that comforts, challenges, unites and transforms. The call to preach is both sacred and communal. These candidates step forward not as individuals but as representatives of families, congregations and a wider Pacific witness within Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa.

Their first session, held via Zoom, reflected the realities of contemporary ministry - technology bridging geography, enabling shared learning across distances. Yet even through screens, their enthusiasm was unmistakable. There was a strong sense of commitment and reassurance that they are ready to serve God faithfully, offering their gifts for the strengthening of Christ's Church.

Lay preaching has long been a vital stream within the Methodist movement. From its beginnings, the ministry of lay women and men has expanded the reach of the gospel and deepened the life of congregations. In this new generation of trainees, we see that same spirit alive — a willingness to learn, to be formed, and to proclaim the good news with humility and courage.

As they begin this demanding and enriching year ahead, Sinoti Samoa invites the wider Connexion to join us in prayer. Formation requires perseverance, theological depth, spiritual discipline and grace. We trust that the Holy Spirit, who has stirred their hearts, will continue to guide and equip them for faithful ministry.

This is more than the beginning of a course. It is a sign of hope. It is evidence that God continues to call, and that people continue to say "Yes." May these candidates grow into confident ambassadors for Christ — proclaiming His Word, serving His people, and strengthening the witness of the Methodist Church in Aotearoa and beyond.



New Ministry Brings a Redirection of Gifts

Lavoni Manukia

Vahefonua welcomes Rev. Kulimoe'anga (Kuli) Fisi'iahi as the new Superintendent of the Auckland/Manukau Tongan Parish; the largest parish in Te Hāhi. After many years serving as a presbyter in general ministry, Kuli, his wife, Luseane, and their family are based back at the parish's Mt Eden HQ. Rev Kuli responds to 12 questions regarding his call to ministry, his spiritual journey, cultural influences and his new vocation.

1. Did you ever anticipate you would become a presbyter?

In my early years, I did not set out with a clear plan to become a presbyter; I simply loved the church, the people and the rhythm of worship.

2. What year, time and place did you know God's call to you to become a presbyter?

I first clearly recognised God's call in 1998 while studying at Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga. It was not a dramatic vision but a persistent sense of direction during research to complete a degree in Theological Studies. By the end of that research, I knew this was the path I was to follow.

3. How did the call come to you?

The call came quietly and persistently through prayer and the needs I saw in my community. I also experienced a growing alignment between my gifts and the responsibilities I was given. Ultimately, the call felt like God opening doors and giving me the courage to walk through them.

4. At that time, who was the most influential person in your life? How did she/he respond to you when you shared your calling with her/him?

At that time, my father and my sister - who raised me when my mother passed away when I was very young - were the most influential people in my life. They raised me with strong faith and humility. When I shared my sense of call, they responded with encouragement, practical support, prayer, advice and sometimes a gentle challenge to mature.

5. What schools did you attend, from primary to secondary?

I attended Ha'amonga Primary School, Tonga High School and Tonga College, where education was basic but some was rooted in Christian values. Those years taught me discipline, community responsibility and the importance of education as a tool for service.

6. Tell us about your time/experience at Sia'atoutai Theological College?

My time at Sia'atoutai Theological College was formative, rigorous and spiritually enriching. There, I gained theological depth, pastoral skills and a network of colleagues who continue to support me. The lecturers challenged me to think critically about Scripture, culture and ministry, while community life taught me humility and accountability.

7. How was your transition from the church in Tonga to the church in New Zealand.

Transitioning from ministry in Tonga to ministry in New Zealand required cultural sensitivity and flexibility; it was a paradigm shift. Transporting home concepts to a foreign land. I learnt new theological approaches at Trinity College to serve a diaspora community. Balancing Tongan identity and honouring the Treaty of Waitangi, navigating institutional structures here in this context. Yet the core call to serve God's people remained the same, just expressed in a different context.

8. In your view, what are the major differences?

The major differences I observe are cultural expression, institutional context and pastoral priorities. In Tonga, the church is deeply woven into daily life and customs, while in New Zealand, the community faces pressures of secularism and socio-economic challenges. Worship styles, family structures and expectations of clergy can differ, requiring pastoral adaptability. However, the foundational gospel and the need for faithful pastoral care are shared across both settings.

9. What year did you become a candidate to become a MCNZ presbyter? Ordained in what year?

I became a candidate for presbyter in the MCNZ in 2010 and was ordained in 2014. The candidacy process involved discernment, theological preparation and endorsement by church bodies. Ordination was a solemn affirmation by the church and a moment of deep personal commitment. Since then, I have continued to learn and grow in ministry.

10. Talk us through your experience in the general ministry, stationing, parishes and posts.

My general ministry has taken me through parish work, community ministry and synod responsibilities. I have been in rural contexts, serving diverse congregations and leading community initiatives. This taught me a range of skills: pastoral counselling, administration, conflict resolution and community engagement. These experiences prepared me for leadership within our Tongan synod and for the responsibilities I now hold.

11. Some may see it as a loss for general ministry, Vahefonua will see it as a blessing. Explain your reason(s) for now being stationed within the Vahefonua Synod?

Leaving general ministry for a role within Vahefonua was not a loss but a redirection of gifts to serve our people more closely. While serving in general ministry broadened my experience, being stationed in Vahefonua allows me to focus on the spiritual and social needs of our Tongan congregations here. I see it as a blessing because I can bring cross-cultural experience and theological understanding to strengthen our synod's mission. It is an opportunity to invest deeply in our people's faith and well-being.

12. In your new role as Superintendent, Auckland/Manukau Tongan Parish, what is your vision, theology, work ethic and passion for the huge vocation you are embarking on?

As Superintendent of Auckland/Manukau Tongan Parish, my vision is to build healthy, Christ-centred communities that nurture faith across generations. Theologically, to induce grace into the essence, to shape our way of life. To do that, we must stand on Scripture, grace and a lived faith that serves both God and neighbour. My work ethic is collaborative and servant-hearted, equipping leaders, supporting Ministers and empowering laypeople. I am passionate about discipleship, youth development and addressing practical needs so our churches can thrive spiritually and socially.

Mālō 'Aupito



CONTACT DETAILS

I welcome your feedback on content included in this publication.

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