



## Keeping our Children Safe is a Collective Responsibility

In December last year Children's Commissioner, Dr Claire Achmad, launched the *Dear Children* nationwide advocacy campaign; her pledge that the safety and wellbeing of all our nation's children matter. The campaign started with a letter ...

*Dear Children,  
There's over a million tamariki in New Zealand.*

*And you've all got your whole lives ahead of you.*

*My job is to be your champion, so you can thrive and enjoy your childhood, protected along the way.*

*As a child, your right to safety is something all of us adults should protect fiercely, so you can grow up free from harm, living your potential.*

*Too often, we've failed to keep the promise to make sure you're all safe.*

*We can't let it happen anymore. We won't.*

*You, your safety and happiness are so important to me that I'm writing this letter to you, and to all New Zealand's children.*

*I'm writing so that you know we all care about you, fully committed to a future where you grow up safe and full of joy.*

*So now, I'm signing my name to that – a safer future for our tamariki.*

*And I'm asking all of New Zealand's adults to join me.*

In my last piece for *Touchstone* in 2024, I invited us all to take that important moment in time – when the National Apology to those abused in care was made – to commit to working towards making Aotearoa New Zealand a place where all children are safe, loved and treated as the precious treasures who they are.

Yet every day in our country, too many of our tamariki experience what no child ever should – harm, neglect, fear and violence. The data shows that on average, a child is killed in Aotearoa New Zealand every 4-5 weeks, and the majority of those children are very young, under the age of five.

Unfortunately, recent Police data shows us that violence against children is increasing. In 2024, more children under 15 years were recorded as victims of violence than in previous years, and the numbers are significantly higher than five years ago. The rate of hospitalisations of children for abuse has also increased over the past five years.

These statistics are confronting. Because they're not abstract figures – they represent real children, in our communities, showing the realities that tamariki are experiencing. These facts show how urgent it is that we collectively be part of the change in our communities to improve children's safety and prevent harm, alongside much-needed systemic change.

Public attention to the scale of this problem is one critical aspect, but it's no more or less important than addressing wider factors and the social context behind them.

We need to ensure that parents and whānau have the resources to take care of their children well, so they can grow up safe and thriving. It's essential that social service organisations across iwi and communities are adequately resourced to support families within their rōhe and communities. We

must address the long-term causes and drivers that create the conditions in which violence and abuse sometimes occur. These include poverty, addiction and other toxic stressors for families, and unmet mental health needs.

Primary prevention is another important aspect to creating lasting change. This is about normalising asking for help and properly supporting parents and families who need it. Making it more okay to offer help in our communities is also crucial, and crystallising collective action – all of us committing to play our part to help keep children safe – is crucial. Making New Zealand into a safer place for all of our nation's children to grow up really will take all of us.

The *Dear Children* campaign is a rallying call not just to policymakers, but to every one of us who lives in and cares about this country. At its heart is a simple message – the letter you read above – that all children have the right to be safe and to grow up free from violence. To every adult reading, I'm saying: we must fiercely protect that right. Too often, we see child harm as someone else's problem – something that happens behind closed doors or in anonymised media articles.

But the thing is, we don't have to wait for more reports, reviews or statistics to act. Creating a safer society is not solely the job those who work every day with children, or of government agencies. We need action now – at the flax-roots level, in our homes, churches, schools and communities. We can be the change, and our nation's children are actually looking to us to be this collective change.

Support from faith communities like yours is integral. In the Methodist ministry to children and young people, you are fully committed to hearing, valuing and empowering the voice of mokopuna, in all areas of your church life, and to caring for whānau within your Connexion. In this kaupapa, you play an important role in keeping children safe and nurturing them to grow up free from harm. Please keep doing this vital mahi, and playing your part to prevent harm and fiercely protect children's rights to grow up safe and well.

Child abuse is 100 percent preventable, but we all need to play our part to make meaningful change. Let's commit to not looking away anymore. Nothing is more important than our children's rights to grow up loved and supported and free from harm, every day.



Rev Young believed he'd found the perfect way to effectively engage with his local MP.

## Jim's Cartoon

*Brendan Boughen*

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



### Standing Together at Waitangi: Prayer, Partnership and Promise



*Te Aroha Rountree, President MCNZ.*

**Waitangi Day invites us to remember our shared history, to tell the truth about our past, and to recommit ourselves to the covenantal future envisioned in Te Tiriti o Waitangi.**

It continues to be one of the most significant moments in the life of Aotearoa, New Zealand. For the Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, it is also a deeply spiritual day — one shaped not only by commemoration, but by karakia, community, and Christian witness.

This year's observance at Waitangi in 2026 carried a strong sense of both reflection and hope. Methodists joined with other churches, iwi leaders, and community groups in an ecumenical gathering that expressed the heart of the gospel: reconciliation, justice, and aroha. In a nation still learning how to live faithfully into the promises of Te Tiriti, the Church's presence was both prayerful and purposeful. At the centre of the day was the ecumenical karakia, held as dawn light spread across Te Whare Rūnanga and the surrounding grounds. Representatives from across denominations stood shoulder to shoulder — Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist and others — united in worship. Scripture was read in te reo Māori and English. Waiata rose into the morning air. Prayers named the griefs and hopes of the nation. The karakia created space to listen — to God, to one another, and to the land itself. There was a tangible sense that prayer is not separate from justice work but integral to it.

For the Methodist whānau, the gathering reflected long-standing commitments to bicultural partnership and to the church's covenant relationship between Tangata Whenua and Tauīwi. These commitments are not abstract principles but living practices that shape how the church worships, leads, and serves. I was joined by Rev Dr Arapera Ngaha and General Secretary Rev Tara Tautari as we participated in the ecumenical services of the day. Throughout the day, Methodist representatives engaged in kōrero with other faith leaders, community advocates, and rangatahi. Conversations touched on housing, education, environmental kaitiakitanga, and the continuing impacts of government engagement. Yet amid the complexity, there remained a shared conviction that faith communities have a distinctive role to play — as bridge-builders, truth-tellers, and people of hope.

In his Waitangi Day sermon on 6 February 2026, Bishop Stephen Lowe offered a reflective and challenging call to deepen New Zealand's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Preaching within the context of national commemoration, he emphasised that the Treaty is not merely a historical document but a living covenant grounded in relationship, justice, and shared responsibility. Drawing on Gospel themes of reconciliation and service, Lowe urged both Church and nation to listen more attentively to Māori voices and to confront enduring inequities with humility and courage. He framed Waitangi Day not as a celebration detached from struggle, but as an opportunity for honest dialogue and renewed partnership. By highlighting the Christian imperative to uphold human dignity and the common good, Lowe connected faith with public life, reminding worshippers that bicultural commitment requires action, not sentiment. His sermon ultimately called for hope rooted in truth—an Aotearoa shaped by mutual respect, faithful promises, and transformative justice.

As the sun set on another Waitangi Day, there was gratitude for the chance to gather, pray, and recommit. The ecumenical spirit, the leadership of Tumuaki Arapera, General Secretary Tara, and myself, and the presence of so many across the Connexion reflected a church seeking to embody Christ's reconciling love. We were honoured to share the day with students, staff and faculty from Trinity Theological College who

were on a block course entitled 'Mana Tiriti' where students spend two days in the classroom developing understanding and knowledge of the early history of Te Hāhi Weteriana and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Then they spend a further three days travelling to Waitangi and exploring the key historical mission sites including Methodist missions to Kaeo and Mangungu, the Marsden Cross at Rangihoua and Pompallier House in Kororāreka.

For Methodists, it is a call to keep walking together — Tangata Whenua and Tauwiwi — trusting that God continues to guide us toward justice, healing, and a shared future grounded in aroha.



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### Commemorating the 12 February 1840 Signing at Māngungu Mission, Hokianga



*Te Aroha Rountree, MCNZ President*

**On 12 February 2026, descendants of rangatira (chiefs) who signed *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and the missionaries present at the historic signing, gathered at Māngungu Mission to commemorate the third and largest signing of Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document.**

The annual gathering this year was especially significant, reflecting both remembrance and renewed commitment to the principles that the Treaty embodies. Māngungu Mission — established in 1828 as a Wesleyan Methodist mission station — was the scene of the largest Treaty hui, where *over 60 rangatira* added their signatures on 12 February 1840, in front of a gathered crowd estimated at around 3,000 people. This signing at Hokianga brought together many northern hapū (sub-tribes) and affirmed *Te Tiriti* beyond its first signing at Waitangi six days earlier.

The 2026 commemorations saw a broad cross-section of attendees — from kaumātua (elders) and kuia (respected older women) to tamariki and rangatahi (children and youth) — and included descendants of the original signatories, tangata whenua (local Māori), and representatives from Christian communities, including members of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, the Methodist Church of New Zealand. Together they reflected on the enduring legacy of *Te Tiriti* and the ongoing work of nurturing understanding and unity among all peoples of Aotearoa.

The commemorative programme blended ceremony with cultural expression. It began with a haka pōwhiri (formal welcome and challenge) on the mission grounds, followed by mihimihi (greetings) and karakia (prayers) in both te reo Māori and English. Speakers — including *uri* (descendants) of treaty signatories — spoke of the meanings embedded in the 1840 gathering, honouring their tūpuna (ancestors) for their leadership, vision and courage at a pivotal moment in the nation's history.

The Treaty signing at Māngungu is more than a historical event on the calendar; it stands as a living reminder of *Te Tiriti's* promise of partnership, protection and participation. Keynote addresses at the 2026 commemoration called on those present to reflect not just on what was signed, but on what continues to be required of all New Zealanders today — especially honouring those principles in relationships between Māori and non-Māori communities, and between hapū and the wider state. Representatives of *Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa* were present to affirm the role Christian mission had at Māngungu — both as a context for the signing and as a continuing voice in conversations about Treaty partnership and reconciliation. Their participation included prayers of blessing, kōrero that acknowledged the faith journeys of all peoples involved, and reflections on how churches can contribute to healing and whanaungatanga (building relationships) in contemporary Aotearoa.

A waka salute on the Hokianga Harbour provided a powerful visual tribute to both the harbour's significance as a meeting place and the enduring connection of Māori to water, land and history.

Many attendees also took part in a hākari (feast) that followed, sharing kai (food), stories, laughter and memories — a traditional means of cementing bonds and renewing alliances. Children from local schools participated in role-plays and educational programmes that helped connect younger generations with the history they inherit, while exhibitions at the mission house showcased photographs from previous commemorations and historical artefacts, helping visitors understand the richness of Hokianga's past.

This year's commemoration at Māngungu Mission brought into sharp focus the interwoven stories of hapū, missionaries, and all those who have engaged with the Treaty's legacy over the last 186 years. It was a day marked by honour for ancestors, reflective kōrero about the present, and hopeful aspirations for the future — challenging participants to uphold the Treaty's promises in tangible ways in their communities, institutions and personal relationships. In gathering together — at a site where rangatira once stood deliberating and committing their tohu — the descendants and representatives of *Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa* reminded all that *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* remains central to conversations about identity, justice, partnership and shared destiny in Aotearoa today.



## AROUND THE CONNEXION



### Vegetable Garden Project – “Laufanua Fou”

*Rev Suiva'aia Te'o*

**On Saturday, 13 December 2025, families and Sunday School leaders from Wesley Wellington Samoan Parish gathered at the parsonage to carry out their Garden Project 2025, which they named “Laufanua Fou – New Land.”**

This project was made possible through the generous support of the Sinoti Punaoa Mission Fund, provided to enable youth groups to engage in practical initiatives that respond to the challenges of climate change and encourage care for God's creation.

The project brought together children, youth, parents, and Sunday School teachers in a shared effort of planting, preparation, and learning. Everyone who attended offered support, guidance, and encouragement, ensuring that the young people were well assisted throughout the day. The

intergenerational participation strengthened relationships within the church community and modelled cooperation, stewardship, and shared responsibility.

We were blessed with fine weather, creating a positive and joyful atmosphere. The children and young people worked with enthusiasm and pride, gaining hands-on experience in caring for the land and understanding the importance of sustainability and environmental responsibility. The project connected faith with action, modelling that caring for the environment is part of our Christian calling and our response to climate change.

“Laufanua Fou – New Land” stands as a meaningful expression of the vision behind the Sinoti Punaoa Mission funding. It has enabled our young people to work the land and to develop awareness, responsibility, and hope for the future. The project has strengthened their sense of belonging, purpose, and commitment to caring for God's creation within their church and wider community.

We acknowledge with deep gratitude the support of Convenor Ruanna Letalu and the Sinoti Punaoa Mission for the financial assistance provided. This funding has made a significant and lasting impact on our Youth and Sunday School ministry. Fa'afetai tele lava for the trust, support, and encouragement given, and may God continue to bless the mission and ministry of Sinoti Samoa.



### Church in the Orchards

*Rev John Carr, Western Bay of Plenty Superintendent*

Each year, thousands of Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers arrive to support the horticultural industry in Aotearoa. Many are deeply rooted in Christian faith traditions. Yet long work hours, limited transport, unfamiliarity with local churches, and the emotional strain of being separated from family often leave them spiritually disconnected.

Over the past several years, conversations began emerging across our parish, where people kept noticing the same thing: these workers were present in our communities, yet pastoral support and advocacy was inconsistent if it was present at all. Over a long and carefully considered period of deliberation, discernment and prayer, our parish created a role for an advocacy and support RSE Pastoral Care ministry. **Viliame Naliva** was appointed to the role in late 2024.

A year on, our parish continues to be blessed by the depth, compassion, and faithfulness he brings to this work. He has walked alongside countless workers, shared in their joys and challenges, and helped create spaces where faith and fellowship can take root far from home.

in December 2025, he administered Holy Communion in a kiwifruit orchard in Whakamarama. The joyful worship, communion, and connection that unfolded beneath the canopy of kiwifruit vines reminds us that the Gospel finds us wherever we are, that community is formed in unexpected places, and that God's presence is as alive in orchards (dare I say more so) as it is in sanctuaries.

*Viliame reflects, "In Whakamarama amidst the dense kiwifruit vines, I administered my first Holy Communion, to a group of cheerful young people from different parts of the Pacific. I'm calling this journey "Church in the Orchards." Praise and thanks be to God for His calling, His plan. This is a new journey. He is God of the New! New life, new hope, new peace, new love, new everything.*

*Sitting with this group of cheerful souls in the middle of the thick kiwifruit orchards, the summer sun beating down on us, had to be one of the most amazing experiences of my life. Who would have thought!*

*We came from different parts of Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga, different backgrounds, different upbringing, different everything, but in that moment, we gathered as one, shaded by the very fruit trees they had come to tender. Even the warm summer afternoon breeze was cooled by the windbreakers that protect the vines. in retrospect, I can only marvel at what God is allowing, planning to happen here.*

*The sound of the Fijian hymns echoing in the miles and miles of kiwifruit trees must have surprised anyone passing. These men didn't hold back. The words of the Psalmist comes to mind: "How can we sing the Lord's song, in a strange land".*

*But this is not a strange land! Aotearoa New Zealand is God's own Land, and we are very blessed to be here.*

*Praise and thanks be to God!*



### **Vahefonua Youth Express Their Voices**

**Lavoni Manukia**

**A Young Leaders Summit, “Building the Future Together,” brought Vahefonua youth, Synod leaders and guest speakers together to contribute to the talanoa of how to navigate the pathway for tomorrow’s Te Hāhi o Weteriana.**

More than 150 young people from across the country gathered in South Auckland for a three-day conference to discuss and express their views on the future of the synod’s formation and drive to draw more youth into positions of decision-making and structuring.

This is not the first time the youth have brought the subject to the forefront for consideration, but this weekend’s discussions were notably more robust. Vahefonua youth expressed their voices and the Vahefonua Tonga O Aotearoa synod indicated they are willing and ready to listen and work with them to determine a future pathway for the synod.

The President of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Aroha Rountree, and General Secretary, Rev. Tara Tautari, were invited to speak at the summit, confirming for participants that this gathering is unlike any they have attended in the past. This time, they want their voices to resonate at the highest levels of the church, and they are being heard. It was announced at the conference that the Council of Conference has made plans for youth representation in future meetings.

The summit, organised by Siaola - the social services arm of the Vahefonua - in collaboration with Vahefonua has been highly anticipated, as many young leaders expressed their views about a lack of voice in the church’s decision-making processes. Sonia Pope, the MCNZ Director of Safeguarding, attended all the meetings to ensure that everyone felt safe to speak and participate in the talanoa. This was a significant first for the church.

Vahefonua Tonga O Aotearoa Superintendent, Rev. Kalolo Fihaki, said that the summit provided an excellent opportunity for the synod to listen to the youth and understand their needs for remaining engaged in the church.

He said that Vahefonua had a vision for church growth, and that collaborating with the youth was essential for moving forward. One of the challenges was keeping them within the church. The insights gathered from the summit will be documented and used as a framework for the Vahefonua’s future initiatives.

Alafua Fale from the Ellerslie Tongan Youth told *Touchstone* that the conference provided him with a better view of Vahefonua, and he gained answers to some of the questions he had in mind before the summit. One of them was not being able to speak up because he thought young people did not have the right or mana because of the age gap.

Lātū Konifelenisi Fonua, a long-time youth leader from the Pulela’ā Church in New Lynn, encouraged the youth to remain faithful despite the perception that little had been done in the past for youth. They should remain hopeful that change was coming.



### #Landback

On Saturday 7 February, around 100 people gathered at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tāmaki Makaurau (and 50 online) for a landmark wānanga, #LandBack: Visions and Realities. The purpose of the event, co-hosted by Common Grace Aotearoa and Tauīwi mō Matike Mai Aotearoa, was to explore the profound movement of land repatriation in Aotearoa.

Participants heard from leaders in the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Catholic churches

who have been involved in returning land to hapū and iwi, as well as a landowner engaging with mana whenua on what should happen to land he recently purchased. The "#Landback" stories remind us that restoration is a spiritual mandate. They highlighted the complexities, time and relationships required to make land return a success, and the challenge us to see whenua not as a commodity to be owned, but as a taonga to be cared for in partnership with hapū and iwi.

### David McNabb, GM Practice and Development, Lifewise, reports on the wananga.

We were reminded that before European contact, Maori had settled all of Aotearoa and operated under a collective system of land ownership. The history of colonisation often included the Crown confiscating land after wars with hapu and iwi. This resulted in trauma, loss and impoverishment for Maori and a painful legacy into the present.

The land was divided into individual titles for sale as a commodity and where the church is concerned, often the land was gifted by Maori for a particular purpose which didn't necessarily mean permanent ownership. Many years later the Church may have land it no longer requires that could be sold but in fact was originally gifted by hapu or iwi and should be returned.

Each speaker reminded us how long many of these processes have taken and are often still underway. It was important to take the time to thoroughly engage in each step, including researching the whakapapa of property, engaging with mana whenua and others who know the history of the land, undertaking the conversation with mana whenua and other relevant parties on what should happen to the land, then negotiating for action on any land transfer.

Rev Dr Arapera Ngaha (Ngai-Tūteauru, Ngāti Hine of Ngāpuhi, and Ngāti Whakaue of Te Arawa) Tumuaki of Te Taha Māori, Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, introduced the history of the Church's bicultural commitment launched in 1983 and their policy on learning the land story of parish and other Church property. Every part of the Church that had land was encouraged to develop a Kōrero Papatupu Whenua. Case studies were shared based on a methodology developed over several years for addressing land owned by the Church, especially where injustice occurred and relationships with Maori need to be restored.

My learnings from the wananga include the following:

- Investigating the land story of church property is an important start to learning about our history and uncovering any unethical land acquisition or usage.
- This process can be a long and involved research and consultation process.!
- The Methodist Church was one of the first to systematically promote land story work and to support a process of redress. They have much experience to share.
- Churches may need to be challenged about their processes and decision-making even where there is a commitment to this process.



### Trinity Methodist Napier Celebrate 150 Years of Service

*Joanne Gaudin, Parish Steward*

**Members of Trinity Methodist Church say with pride that Trinity is the only church in Napier that was built prior to the Hawke's Bay earthquake of 1931. Its beginnings, however, were more precarious.**

After the first trustee meeting on 28 May, 1874, to consider options for building a church on Clive Square, calamities included budget blowouts, financially embarrassed contractors skipping town and wild weather knocking the partially completed building

to the ground. The trustees had the opportunity to revise the original specifications, and despite increased costs, building was finally able to go ahead, uninterrupted. Trinity Church, built of kauri, 'in that style of Gothic architecture called early English', and praised as 'an ornament to the town', was opened on 23 January 1876.

Fast forward to 8 February 2026, as Trinity celebrates their 150th Anniversary we reflect on many changes ... 48 presbyters; three major alteration jobs (the first just one year after completion, a major refit in 1956 which completely transformed the interior and saw the installation of two beautiful lead light windows; earthquake strengthening and a rebuild of the lounge, kitchen and offices following the 2011 Christchurch event; ever changing congregation sizes - first increasing but lately shrinking - the addition in 1998 of a Tongan congregation who are still going strong and make up a large part of the current congregation and in 2021 the establishment of a Fijian congregation

The Sunday morning celebration service attracted a congregation of 160, including MCNZ President Te Aroha Rountree, head of Te Hapai Rev Nicola Grundy, LNIS Superintendent Rev Neti Petaia, Past Presbyters Rev Epeli Taungapeau, Rev Tony Franklin-Ross, Rev David Harding, Kathleen Dixon, and Rev Ken Olsen. Members of the Davis family, the Laws family, the Whitten family, the Clark family - all of whose families had important roles to play in the development of Trinity over the last 100 years - participated, along with many others from the community who shared memories of attending Sunday School or Bible Class, being married at Trinity or just being a part of the congregation for a period of time.

The service was followed by an al fresco luncheon where the celebration cake was cut by Peter Williams, organist for over three decades and President Te Aroha.

Current presbyter Rev 'Ofa Taukolo writes:

*I am truly thrilled to reflect on our incredible 150th anniversary celebration. What a remarkable milestone! This event not only honours the rich history and enduring spirit of our church community over the past century and a half, but it also holds special significance for me personally, as it marks my third year of service here and my first as a presbyter.*

*Being part of this historic celebration was nothing short of a blessing. Coming together with such a diverse and vibrant congregation, as well as members of our community, filled my heart with joy and hope. I am immensely grateful for this experience, which has deepened my commitment to grow and serve alongside our church family. It is an absolute privilege to witness and participate in the incredible work that God continues to do through Trinity Methodist Church.*



### **Accelerating Climate Emergency Requires Accelerated Action**

*Rev Mark Gibson*

**2026 is already shaping up as Te Tau o te āwhā, the Year of the Storm. By mid-February a weather-related state of emergency had been declared eight times in Aotearoa.**

This was the same number of emergencies called across the nation in all of 2025. In 2015 there were only four weather-related states of emergency. The term one-in-a-hundred-year storm is becoming irrelevant as the number of big storms ravaging the motu rises rapidly.

The cost has been enormous. Ten people have so far tragically lost their lives as a direct result of these storms, and the financial cost to the nation has been staggering. Experts say we are also increasingly bearing the emotional and psychological cost of these destructive storms. Then there is the ecological cost - destruction to trees and wildlife, coastlines and rivers – which is often overlooked.

Many of us will have already felt some of this impact in 2026, or within the last year. This is what the unfolding climate emergency looks like. It affects more and more people, with increasing frequency

All of this is happening in the political context of a government that is reversing climate action progress on multiple fronts. The same week that multiple states of emergency were called across both the South Island and the North Island, Treasury announced the formal closing of the Climate Emergency Response fund. This effectively withdrew billions of dollars from assisting with dealing with the impacts of storm damage.

So, during this Lenten season we have much to reflect on as a Hāhi that is journeying through the Decade on Climate Justice and currently focused on the theme of climate-induced displacement. A theme that seems more relevant by the day. What is the Spirit saying to us?

At the heart of Lenten spirituality is metanoia, knowing and doing God's will, that involves a profound change of heart, mind and perspective. As we turn towards the cross, we are called by God again to orientate our lives towards God's justice.

In the context of an accelerating climate emergency this surely means responding in a way that acts for justice.

Justice asks of us to stand in solidarity with those who bear the greatest brunt of the emergency. Justice also asks us to speak truth to power. In an election year this calling takes on even greater importance. How can we as followers of Christ and as faith communities demand that political leaders take climate justice action and actively support those who have made this commitment in more than just word. In these stormy times we need leadership that protects the most vulnerable and confronts what is swelling the tempest.

But above all, in these stormy times we the church are called to build communities of solidarity, prophetic hope, courage and transformative love



## The Ripple Effect of The Walk for Peace

*Rev Dr Mary Caygill*

**On 10 February I connected to the live Interfaith Service at Washington National Cathedral to mark the arrival of 19 Buddhist monks, following a 108 day walk across America. The "Walk for Peace," began in San Antonio, Texas, on 26 October, 2025, as the monks traversed some 2,300 miles across nine respective US States.**

Their journey has attracted crowds in their thousands along the way captivating hearts and minds both within the USA and across international borders. The walk was for the purpose of raising, in their words, an "awareness of peace, loving kindness, and compassion across America and the world."

"We walk not to protest, but to awaken the peace that already lives within each of us," said Bhikkhu Pannakara, spiritual leader of the Walk for Peace. "The Walk for Peace is a simple yet meaningful reminder that unity and kindness begin within each of us and can radiate outward to families, communities, and society as a whole."

The rhythm of the pilgrimage was simple and demanding. The monks rose before dawn and walked in silence through the early morning hours. They took a break before midday, often welcomed and fed by a local church, civic group or community centre. Food was followed by some short teachings, led by the monks. Simple reflections on forgiveness, compassion, joy, healing, and mindful awareness of the present moment. Then the monks would walk again until sundown, when another host received them. Walking faithfully alongside them has been Aloka, a rescue dog they adopted in 2022. Padding through slush and snow, Aloka is a small and joyful reminder that peace can walk on four legs.

In January, the monks posted a response to the question most frequently asked of them along the way: **Why are you walking?**

*Some people may doubt that our walk can bring peace to the world — and we understand that doubt completely. But everything that has ever mattered began with something impossibly small. A single seed. A first mindful breath. A quiet decision to take one step, then another.*

*Our walking itself cannot create peace. But when someone encounters us — whether by the roadside, online, or through a friend — when our message touches something deep within them, when it awakens the peace that has always lived quietly in their own heart — something sacred begins to unfold. That person carries something forward they didn't have before, or perhaps something they had forgotten was there. They become more mindful in their daily life — more present with each breath, more aware of each moment. They speak a little more gently to their child. They listen more patiently to their partner. They extend kindness to a stranger who needed it desperately.*

*And that stranger, touched by unexpected compassion, carries it forward to someone else. And it continues — ripple by ripple, heart by heart, moment by moment — spreading outward in ways none of us will ever fully witness, creating more peace in the world than we could possibly measure. This is our contribution — not to force peace upon the world, but to help nurture it, one awakened heart at a time. Not the Walk for Peace alone can do this, but all of us together — everyone who has been walking with us in spirit, everyone who feels something stir within them when they encounter this journey, everyone who decides that cultivating peace within themselves matters. One step becomes two. Two become a thousand. A thousand become countless. And slowly, gently, persistently — not through grand gestures but through ten thousand small acts of love — we can help make the world more peaceful.*

*This is our hope. This is our offering. This is why we walk. May you and all beings be well, happy, and at peace.*

**For the world's sake may it be so**



### How Big Is Your Church?

*Rev Andrew Howley, UCANZ Executive Officer*

**When I was first ordained, people would often ask me, "How big is your church?" For many of us, that question brings a quiet sense of dread. We know the numbers are not what they once were.**

We know the building is not as full as we might hope. In many places across Aotearoa, congregations are ageing or declining. So, when someone asks how big the church is, it can feel less like curiosity and more like an evaluation. We instinctively answer by counting heads.

On most Sundays, many of our churches feel small, local, perhaps even like family. We think about attendance, the parish roll, the budget, the number of volunteers we can rely on. The Church can feel fragile, even marginal, in a society that no longer assumes faith as the norm. But Scripture invites us to answer that question differently.) The Church, in its deepest sense, is not defined by geography or weekly numbers. It is defined by belonging to Christ.

Reformed theology has often distinguished between the visible Church - what we can see, count, organise and worry about - and the invisible Church, the whole company of those whom Christ gathers to himself across time and space. On a Sunday morning, what we see may be modest. But what Christ is building is immeasurable.

That means as congregations in Aotearoa New Zealand we are never as isolated or small in the ways we sometimes imagine. When someone is baptised here, they are baptised into the same body as Christians in Rome, Nairobi, Seoul, São Paulo, and in villages and cities across the Pacific. One baptism. One faith. One Lord.

That includes the Church expressed in different cultures within this land - Māori and Pākehā, longstanding congregations and newer migrant fellowships - all drawn into one body through Christ. Our unity is not uniformity. It is shared belonging.

In the past year, the global nature of the Church has been visible in refreshing ways. 1700 years after the Council of Nicaea, Christians across traditions marked the anniversary of the Nicene Creed. When we stand and say those ancient words, we join a living confession shared across centuries and cultures.

That matters, especially as we carry uncertainty. We live with war and rumours of war. We see powerful nations asserting themselves with little regard for smaller countries or the rule of law. We feel the pressure of political polarisation and the rise of Christian nationalism, which shrinks the Church to fit one culture or one agenda.

Against that, the global Church offers a different witness. It reminds us that Christ cannot be claimed by any nation. Nor denomination. The Body of Christ is larger than any political movement, older than any modern state, and more enduring than any moment of crisis.

So how big is your church? If you measure only what you can see on a Sunday morning, it may seem modest or even insignificant. But if you measure it by baptism, by shared confession, by communion with believers across denominations, across your town or city, around the world and across time, it is vast.

Your church stretches back many centuries and across every continent. It includes the persecuted and the powerful, the confident and the doubting. It is held together not by culture or politics, but by Christ. That is the true size of the Church.