



One Household Under God: Healing the Strain in the Pacific Church

Te Aroha Rountree, President MCNZ

At the recent Pacific Church Leaders Meeting in Suva, Fiji, a powerful thread emerged through worship, devotion, and talanoa: the image of the “household of God.” Gathered as a regional expression of faith, with strong participation from the Methodist Church of New Zealand, leaders reflected deeply on both the strength and strain within this shared household.

Opening devotions grounded the gathering in karakia and scripture, weaving together te reo Māori, English, and Pacific languages in a living expression of unity. The call was clear from the beginning: we are one household under God—yet that household is under pressure. The question placed before the

gathering was both simple and searching: *Where is the household under strain, and what does healing require of us?*

A House Built on Relationships

Drawing from the Gospel of Mark—“a house divided against itself cannot stand”—leaders were reminded that the biblical idea of a “house” is not a building, but a network of relationships. In Ephesians, the church is described as the household of God: a people bound together, not by uniformity, but by belonging.

For Pacific communities, this resonates deeply. We understand ourselves as *whānau*, *aiga*, *kainga*—not isolated individuals, but relational people shaped by connection. The household is not abstract; it is lived in daily acts of care, obligation, and love. It includes not only people, but also whenua (land), moana (ocean), and Atua (God). This expansive vision challenges narrow understandings of church. It calls us to see the household as an interconnected system of life—spiritual, social, and ecological.

Naming the Strain

Yet the gathering did not shy away from naming the fractures within this household. Across the Pacific, leaders spoke of deep and layered strain. Colonisation remains a defining wound. It has disrupted relationships between people and land, weakened cultural and spiritual foundations, and introduced systems that continue to marginalise Indigenous knowledge and authority. These impacts are not confined to history; they shape present realities of inequality, dislocation, and ecological harm.

Within the church itself, tensions also persist. Western theological frameworks have often dominated, leaving little room for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. When unity is pursued as sameness—rather than as a covenant of diverse voices—some are heard while others are silenced.

Division, as the devotions reminded the gathering, is not always loud. It can be quiet and subtle:

- Unspoken hurt
- Broken relationships
- Generational disconnect
- Cultural misunderstanding

In te ao Māori, such fractures diminish *mana* and weaken *mauri*. In Pacific thought, they damage the *vā*—the sacred relational space that holds communities together. When the *vā* is broken, the whole household feels it.

Strengths That Endure

Despite these challenges, the meeting in Suva was marked not by despair, but by hope. The strengths within the Pacific household remain profound.

Leaders lifted up enduring values such as:

- *Manaakitanga* — hospitality grounded in grace
- *Whanaungatanga* — deep relational belonging
- *Kaitiakitanga* — care and guardianship of creation

These are not abstract ideals; they are lived practices that continue to sustain communities across the Pacific. They offer a blueprint for restoration—a way of being that draws the household back into right relationship.

Scripture affirms this vision. In Romans 8, all creation groans together, longing for restoration. In Psalm 24, we are reminded that the earth and everything in it belongs to God. These texts expand the idea of the household to include all creation, reinforcing a theology of interconnectedness.

Rethinking Unity

A key insight from the gathering was the need to reclaim a deeper understanding of unity. Too often, unity has been confused with uniformity. But true unity—*kotahitanga*—does not erase difference. It honours it.

As reflected through 1 Corinthians 12, the body has many parts, each essential. Difference is not a threat to the household; it is what makes the household whole. This reframing is critical in a post-colonial context. Unity must resist the pressures of assimilation and instead embrace covenantal diversity—where each culture, language, and identity contributes uniquely to the life of the whole.

The Work of Healing

If division weakens the house, then restoration strengthens it. The Suva meeting called the church into the sacred work of healing—work that is both relational and structural. Healing begins with truth-telling: naming past and present harms honestly. It requires listening—especially to Indigenous voices that have too often been marginalised. It calls for the restoration of relationships, grounded in forgiveness, grace, and accountability.

But healing is also about justice. It involves active steps:

- Restoring right relationships with whenua and moana
- Protecting ecosystems under threat
- Supporting cultural and spiritual renewal
- Challenging systems that perpetuate inequality

One powerful example shared was the decision by church leaders in Aotearoa to retire colonial vestments in favour of garments grounded in Indigenous identity and whakapapa. This act, though symbolic, signalled a deeper commitment to decolonisation and to reshaping the life of the church in ways that reflect justice and liberation.

A House That Will Stand

As the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting concluded, the message remained clear: a divided house cannot stand—but a unified house, grounded in love and right relationship, will endure.

The call to the church is not simply to maintain unity, but to protect it, nurture it, and restore it where it has been broken. This is not easy work. It requires humility, courage, and a willingness to change. Yet it is also hopeful work. Because every act of reconciliation, every restored relationship, every step toward justice rebuilds the household of God.

In Christ, we are not many separate houses. We are one. And by God's grace, that house—though tested—will stand. Mauriora.



From Uncertainty to Clarity: A Season of Renewal for Methodist Mission Northern

Pam Elgar ONZM, CEO and Executive Chair

Over the past few years, Methodist Mission Northern has been navigating a season marked by complexity, uncertainty, and ultimately, renewal. Renewed governance will bring positive change.

Many across the Methodist Church will be aware that the Mission has been operating through a structure of three Trusts: Methodist Mission Northern, Lifewise, and Airedale Property Trust. While this model was established with good intentions, over time it became clear that it was no longer serving the mission, the Church, or the people and communities at the heart of our work as well as it should.

These challenges were not simply structural or financial, though both were significant. At their core, they were relational and missional. Fragmentation had made it harder to act as one organisation, harder to be transparent, and harder to remain deeply connected to the Church that birthed and sustained this work.

Recognising this, the Methodist Church took an important step by appointing Margaret Devlin and then Amokura Panaho as Commissioner. Her task was to listen carefully, discern wisely, and provide recommendations on how best to support Methodist Mission Northern into the future. The acceptance of those recommendations by the Church marked a significant turning point.

As part of that process, I was appointed Executive Chair, charged with implementing the Commissioner's recommendations. One of the most visible and consequential changes was the disestablishment of the three separate Boards and the appointment of a single Board for Methodist Mission Northern, carrying responsibility for all three legal entities.

This was not a decision taken lightly. Change of this magnitude never is. The new Board brings together people of deep faith, wisdom, and professional expertise: Rev Dr Arapera Ngaha, Rev Abhishek Solomon, Sonia Pope, Ruanna Letalu, Ruth Bruce (Independent), Leon Wijohn (Independent), and me as Chair. All members are new to the Mission, except for Rev Abhishek Solomon, who previously served on the Lifewise Board. Together, we meet monthly and carry a shared commitment to stewarding the Mission with integrity, courage, and faithfulness.

At the heart of this renewed governance arrangement sits a clear and compelling vision: **Connected, Just, and Inclusive Communities**. This vision anchors our decision-making and reminds us why Methodist Mission Northern exists. We are here not to preserve structures for their own sake, but to serve people - whānau, individuals, and communities - particularly those experiencing hardship or exclusion.

Over the past year, our focus has been on rebuilding and reconnecting: reconnecting the three parts of the organisation to one another, reconnecting with the Methodist Church, and reconnecting internally so that staff across Lifewise, Methodist Mission Northern, and Airedale Property Trust can operate as one cohesive organisation. Alongside this relational work, we have prioritised improving transparency - within the organisation, with the Church, and with our wider stakeholders - and putting in place the internal structures needed to support long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

We are not without challenges. Financial pressure remains real, driven by the complexity and cost of delivering essential services and by a property portfolio that has not consistently

delivered adequate commercial returns. The incomplete status of the Everil Orr project continues to be a concern, and rebuilding strong, trusting connections with Northern Synod and other Synods requires ongoing commitment and openness.

Yet alongside these challenges sit significant opportunities. This season has created space for clarity of purpose and renewed trust. It has allowed us to ask hard questions about how we best live out our Methodist values in today's world, and how governance, leadership, and service delivery can align more closely with our mission.

A whakataukī has sat quietly but powerfully behind all this work: "**He aha te mea nui? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.**"

What is the most important thing? It is people, it is people, it is people.

This truth has guided our decisions as trustees and continues to shape our path forward. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge those who have gone before us. I want to thank the previous Board members of Methodist Mission Northern, Lifewise, and Airedale Property Trust, as well as former CEOs and Heads of Mission, for their dedication and contribution to our shared history. Their work laid foundations on which we now build.

I am deeply grateful to our current Board for the bravery they have shown in enabling a new structure to emerge and in supporting a refreshed leadership team and strategic direction. Change asks much of people, and the willingness to step into uncertainty is never easy.

Equally, I want to acknowledge the resilience and trust shown by staff across all three trusts. Navigating a significant change process takes courage, openness, and commitment, and I have seen those qualities in abundance.

I am delighted to have accepted the role of Chief Executive Officer of Methodist Mission Northern, enabling me to continue this important work in service of our mission alongside our Board, staff, and wider Church community. I am also pleased to share that Ruth Bruce has been appointed as Chair of Methodist Mission Northern, and I value the leadership partnership we are building as we continue to embed the new structure and look ahead together.

On a personal note, I am thankful for the unwavering support and guidance of our General Secretary, Rev Tara Tautari, as I learned how to work within the life and context of the Methodist Church. The support and friendship extended by Jill Hawkey and David Hanna were also invaluable during this season.

As we look ahead, we do so with realism and hope. We are resolutely focused on the difference we can make in the lives of those we serve. Our purpose is simple and profound: **to serve**. Every structure, every decision, and every conversation must ultimately be measured against that calling.

May we continue to walk this path together - with humility, faith, and a deep commitment to the people and communities God has entrusted to our care.



Jim's Cartoon.

Brendan Boughen

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



Hospital Chaplaincy Challenging & Rewarding

Rev Kesi Filiai

Hospital chaplaincy is a sacred calling. At New Zealand's busiest hospital, the pace is demanding, the needs are great, and each day brings new opportunities to be present with people in moments that matter most.

Hospital chaplaincy is a sacred calling within the life and mission of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, a ministry grounded in compassion, presence, and the love of Christ. It reflects our church's commitment to know Christ and to make Him known, not only within our congregations but also in the wider community, especially among the most vulnerable.

What drew me to hospital chaplaincy

I was drawn to hospital chaplaincy by a deep sense of God's calling to serve beyond the church's walls. In many ways, the

hospital becomes a parish of its own, a place where people from all walks of life gather, often carrying pain, uncertainty, and questions about life and faith. Coming from a strong Methodist and Pasifika church background, I have always valued caring for one another, especially in times of need. Hospital chaplaincy felt like a natural extension of that calling, to be present with people in their most vulnerable moments, offering prayer and comfort. Simply being there, listening to patients, is pivotal in my role as hospital chaplain.

Serving at Auckland City Hospital has deepened that calling. The diversity, urgency, and scale of need are constant reminders that this ministry is not about having all the answers but about faithfully showing up with compassion and grace.

The joys of chaplaincy

One of the greatest joys of hospital chaplaincy is the privilege of entering sacred moments in people's lives. Whether it is praying with a patient before surgery, sitting with a family receiving difficult news, or offering comfort at the end of life and in grief, these moments are deeply humbling. There is also great joy in witnessing faith in action. In the Methodist tradition, we often speak of grace, and in hospital settings, that grace becomes visible in powerful ways. It is seen in resilience, in hope, and in the quiet trust people place in God, even amid uncertainty.

At Auckland City Hospital, the diversity of cultures is especially evident. We encounter Māori, Pasifika, and many other communities, each bringing their own spiritual practices and values. It is a privilege to engage with this richness, learning to serve in ways that are culturally respectful and inclusive. Often, the most meaningful moments are the simplest, such as holding a hand, offering a prayer, or sitting in silence. In a busy hospital environment, these small acts can bring deep peace and connection.

The challenges

Alongside the joys, there are significant challenges. Walking with people through grief, trauma, and loss can be emotionally demanding. In a large, busy hospital like Auckland City Hospital, these situations occur frequently, and the intensity can be overwhelming. There are moments when words are not enough, and we are reminded that our presence matters more than any explanation we could offer.

Working in a secular and multi-faith environment also requires sensitivity and wisdom. As Methodist chaplains, we are called to remain grounded in our faith while respecting others. This balance can be challenging, but it is also an opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love in an open and welcoming way.

The hospital's pace is another challenge. With so many patients and limited time, we are not always able to spend as much time with each person as we would like. Learning to be fully present, even in brief encounters, is an important part of this ministry. There is also an ongoing need to care for our well-being. To continue serving others, we must remain spiritually grounded in a deep well of peace through prayer, reflection, and support. I also balance hobbies, exercise, family time, and work. This is a must-do practice for my chaplaincy.

Support from the hospital and the church

Support is vital to sustaining this ministry. At Auckland City Hospital, the chaplaincy team provides strong collegial support. We share, debrief, and encourage one another, recognising the weight and importance of our work.

Hospital staff also value our role. It is a privilege to work alongside them as part of the wider care team, supporting patients and staff alike.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand provides essential spiritual and communal support. Through our connexional structure, we are reminded that we are part of something greater than ourselves. The prayers, encouragement, and connection within our church communities strengthen us in this calling. This support is also expressed in a practical way through Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa ongoing annual financial commitment, which helps sustain the chaplaincy ministry and enables our continued presence within hospitals across Aotearoa.

The Tongan Vahefonua Synod Superintendent, Kalolo Fihaki, and the Vahengangaue Auckland Manukau Parish, led by Rev Kuli Fisi'iahi and supported by Rev 'Ikilifi Pope from New Lynn Methodist Church, Pita Hoha, and the Vahengangaue Auckland Manukau Evangelio team, are invaluable. The Pitt Street Methodist Church, under the leadership of Rev Metuisela Tafuna, supports Auckland hospitals year-round. and 15 Tongan denominations currently participate. Support also comes from family, culture, and church life. This collective strength sustains us as we serve in demanding environments, though more Methodist churches are needed to volunteer.

A typical day or week

No two days in hospital chaplaincy are ever the same, especially in a setting as busy as Auckland City Hospital. A typical day often begins with personal prayer or quiet Bible reflection, grounding us before entering the hospital environment. Ward rounds are a key part of the day, during which we visit patients and connect with families. Some visits are brief, while others involve deeper pastoral care, prayer, or simply being present.

We may also be called to respond to urgent situations, including critical care and end-of-life moments. These times require sensitivity, compassion, and readiness to serve in whatever way is needed. Throughout the week, there are also opportunities to support hospital staff, participate in services, and connect with community faith leaders.

Final reflections

Hospital chaplaincy is both challenging and deeply rewarding. It is a ministry that calls us to be present, to listen, and to love without expectation.

In the Methodist tradition, we are reminded of John Wesley's call to "do all the good you can." In a busy hospital, this often takes the form of simple acts; a kind word, a prayer, or a quiet presence. Amid the busyness and pressure, God is at work. It is a privilege to witness this and to be part of bringing comfort, hope, and reassurance to those in need.

In this ministry, I am constantly reminded that no moment of compassion is ever wasted and that no person is ever alone.

"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." John Wesley

Proverbs 3:27 "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act".

Blessings 'Ofa lahi atu



McAra Courts Makeover

Ady Shannon

A collaboration between a uniting parish saddled with aging rental units and a Methodist Mission with a passion for providing affordable housing for aging renters has resulted in an outstanding housing outcome.

On Tuesday 31 March members of the Port Hills Uniting Parish joined staff from the Christchurch Methodist Mission (CMM), contractors involved in the project and incoming tenants, to celebrate the refurbishment and reopening of four accommodation

units known as McAra Courts in the seaside suburb of Sumner. Following a blessing by Mātua Daniel Mataki, CMM Executive Director Jill Hawkey acknowledged mana whenua and past parishioners for their contribution to the successful project outcome.

“As we gather I want to acknowledge mana whenua Ngāi Tuāhuririri who have walked on these lands and gathered kai from these waters for centuries. And let us also remember the members of this parish who are no longer with us, but whose vision, generosity and understanding of the value of a warm dry home led them to care for this land and these houses.”

Amongst those attending the reopening was Cheri Cundall, who arrived with a few boxes of her possessions in preparation for moving back into her refurbished unit later that week. Cheri had lived in McAra Courts since October 2020 and when she moved out in September 2025 in preparation for the renovations to begin, she was the only remaining tenant in the block.

Built in the 1970s, the block rental units were owned and managed by the Port Hills Uniting Parish and transferred to the Methodist Charitable Care Facilities Trust in 2003. The dated units required significant work to comply with Healthy Homes Standards introduced in 2025. The parish approached the CMM to see if they would take over the ownership of the homes, oversee the major renovation works required and add the complex to the portfolio of properties owned and managed by CMM. In acknowledging the skills and expertise of the many contractors and personnel involved in the transformation of the Sumner site, Jill extended a special thanks to the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches for their cooperation in enabling the transfer of title and release of funds for the makeover.

The project included the removal of asbestos, a new roof, the installation of extensive double glazed window joinery, recladding, the addition of heat pumps and insulation, front and rear patio areas, and a complete upgrade of the entire interior including modern kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities. The removal of several trees has transformed the site and extensive paving, raised garden beds and new fencing ensures each unit has privacy and accessible, sunny, outdoor living areas.

Over recent years CMM has been involved in a range of building and renovation projects and collaborations - in Christchurch and Blenheim - designed to create safe and affordable living opportunities for people in need. They are increasingly seeing older people in housing distress, so welcomed the opportunity to create rental opportunities in a suburb where the median rent for a one bedroom unit is \$600 per week. The issue of unaffordable housing is not restricted to Christchurch or Blenheim, Jill says. “It is estimated that by 2050 we will require 400,000 rental homes for older people throughout New Zealand. Currently we have less than one third of that number.”

For four tenants in Sumner, unaffordable rent is no longer an issue thanks to the collaboration between a parish and a Mission committed to solving the problem by combining skills and resources, one property at a time.



Church Leaders Engaged in Improving Pasifika Health

Lavoni Manukia

The Auckland Manukau Tongan Parish is launching a programme to work with government health officials to improve the wellbeing of its members.

Pacific Public Health invited a contingent of Tongan church leaders from different denominations, including Te Hāhi, to a hui on Friday 24 April, to share an initiative that will involve the church leaders in

improving the health and wellbeing of Aotearoa’s sizable and swelling Tongan community.

The government agency says that to boost the health and wellbeing of the community, church leaders are key to getting the message across. Pacific Public Health is commissioned by Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand). The newly appointed superintendent of the Auckland Manukau Tongan Parish, Rev Kulī Fisi’iahi, conducted the opening prayer for the hui.

He is already formulating an action plan that will involve creating a task group to work with Pacific Public Health to engage with the church members and the 15 congregations in the parish he leads.

Pacific Principal Analyst Team Lead, Dr Julianne Faletau, says it’s the first time since its formation that the unit has reached out to the community..

“We are here today not only to introduce ourselves to the community but also to showcase our work, with the hope of fostering relationships so we can work together to get the messages across to improve the lives of the community”.

According to statistics, Pasifika health in Aotearoa does not fare well in comparison to all other ethnicities. The Pacific Public Health (National Public Health Service), aims to improve key priority areas such as cancer screening, immunisation rates, and mental health and wellbeing interventions. Key messaging and initiatives will encourage healthy eating and physical activity, and highlight the harm caused by alcohol and smoking. An additional aim is to protect communities from health hazards and threats.



WHAKAMĀORITIA

John Wesley’s Words in Te Reo

Geoff Allen, Kaitiaki Pitt St Theatre, shares a translation of "Do all the good you can..." he had done for the theatre by top te reo lecturer and author Hemi Kelly, eight years ago. Hemi is of Ngati Maniapoto and Ngati Tahu-Ngati Whaoa descent.

Tāu e mahi ai, mahia i runga i te tika

“Do all the good you can,

Mahia i runga i te kaha ōu

By all the means you can,

Mahia i runga i te āhei ōu

In all the ways you can,

I ngā wāhi me ngā wā katoa e taea ana

In all the places you can,

Tae atu ki ngā tāngata katoa

At all the times you can,

I te roa ōu i tēnei ao

To all the people you can,

As long as ever you can.”



REFLECTION



Picture Books a Rich Resource for Lay Preaching

Penny Guy

I have been a Methodist Lay Preacher for 14 years, a children's librarian for 22 years and a lover of picture books for over 45 years. Familiarity with children's books has given me an extra tool for lay preaching.

In my paid work, I regularly read picture books to children – sometimes to those who probably think they are too old for them. I always tell them, “You’re never too old for picture books. A good picture book will appeal to people of any age”. I like to share one when I am leading a service and they are always appreciated. Although he didn’t have picture-books, Jesus knew the value of a good story to convey truths to an audience.

When choosing a book, I don’t look in the religion section of the children’s nonfiction collection. Though often worthy they are usually not particularly engaging. I also steer clear of books that seem to be written for the sole purpose of teaching a moral lesson. Children (and adults) can learn a lot from books but will respond better to a great story with a subtle message rather than one that hammers home a message at the expense of the story. I have the advantage of being in the library five days a week and I am often looking through the picture books. Sometimes a title I know will come to mind while I’m preparing a service, other times I will have to do some searching. Serendipity also plays a part.

If you are not familiar with the bounty of children’s picture books, I recommend you explore your library’s catalogue and learn how to search it. You will be able to search for a subject or concept and should be able to narrow it down to just picture books. Ask a librarian to give you some pointers if you are having trouble. When searching for a particular topic, be reasonably broad and try a couple of different synonyms.

When you have found some possible titles, read them to see if they are suitable:

- Are they interesting?
- Are they beautiful?
- Can you identify with the characters?
- Does it convey the message you want?

When you have found a suitable book, practice reading it - enunciating clearly, varying your volume, tone, and speed, using pauses – just like delivering a reflection/sermon.

Some picture books I have read to congregations recently include:

Deep by Stephen Hogtun. Themes love maternal

Once Upon a Small Rhinoceros by Meg McKinlay. Themes Adventure and adventurers, Courage.

The Water Bottle by Philippa Werry. Themes WWI, Friendship.

There Might be Lobsters by Carolyn Crimi. Theme Fear.

A note of caution – I regularly take services in three different churches but can only read picture books in two of them. The third church live streams their service each week so to read a picture book there would be a breach of copyright, unless you have prior permission from the publisher.

If you haven’t used a picture book in a service recently, why not give it a try? And have fun exploring the titles available to you.



Holding onto Faith in Times of Adversity

Rev Dr Susan Thompson

At Tamahere people are often confronted with hard situations: unexpected griefs, painful diagnoses, the prospect of early death. There are no easy answers to any of these situations.

I've recently been reading the life-story of the writer Kate Bowler which explores the idea of living with questions that aren't easy to answer. Kate was living a wonderful life.

Married in her twenties, she had a baby in her thirties and got a job she loved straight out of university. Then at the age of 35 she was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. "One moment," she says, "I was a regular person with regular problems ... the next, I was someone with cancer".

Kate's life was turned upside down and she asked all sorts of questions. Why was this happening? What did her suffering mean? And where was God? The world of certainty had ended, she says, "and so many people seemed to know why"; yet the answers they gave sometimes felt worse than the cancer itself.

Some Christians told her she shouldn't complain or feel upset as death wasn't that important, heaven was her true home; which made her want to ask if they would like to go home first. Others told her her illness was a part of God's secret plan to improve her, a test of faith to make her stronger; which made her wonder what else she might have to lose to become a better person. Still others told her to keep a positive attitude; which made her want to send them a cheery poster when they were facing the prospect of a grisly death.

One thing such comments had in common was an underlying assertion that everything happens for a reason, a belief which Kate increasingly came to question. She noted there was often "a trite cruelty in the logic of the perfectly certain". It felt truer and more compassionate to simply admit that some things are just not possible to understand or explain.

In the midst of this, Kate found only one thing she could hold onto. "At a time when I should have felt abandoned by God," she says, "I was not reduced to ashes." Instead, "I felt like I was floating on the love and prayers of all those who hummed around me like worker bees, bringing notes and flowers and warm socks." Somehow in the midst of all the questions she couldn't answer, she knew one thing and one thing absolutely: that God was with her.

There may be times in our lives when hard things happen and well-meaning comments and cliches just don't help. When we're forced to live with the unknowable, the unchangeable, the unsolvable, I hope that we also may find a way to hold onto something that stays true and constant. For Kate that something was her faith that God is with us in the long dark night. God will meet us in love and never let us go even when all else seems impossible.



CONTACT DETAILS

I welcome your feedback on content included in this publication.

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A crown of beauty instead of ashes

Dr Murray Sheard, CEO of cbm New Zealand.

"...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." – Isaiah 61:3

Motherhood is a precious gift, yet for many mothers it is also shaped by loss and trauma.

When Arziki's labour began at home in rural Nigeria, the women around her did what they could, but there were no trained midwives nearby. After four

long and painful days, she was rushed to hospital for an emergency caesarean section.

Her baby was stillborn.

In the days following the surgery, Arziki realised that something was wrong.

"After the operation, while lying in my hospital bed, I noticed the bedsheet was wet and was told it was a fistula."

Within hours of her baby's death, a small fragment of oxygen-starved flesh began to break down, leaving a tear. Urine started to leak through Arziki's birth canal – an obstetric fistula had formed.

Every year more than 100,000 mothers will develop obstetric fistula due to traumatic childbirth. Worldwide, an estimated two million mothers live with the constant leaking and smell. Of the more than 100,000 new cases of obstetric fistula expected next year, around 40,000 will occur in Nigeria alone.

Without treatment, obstetric fistula can lead to long-term medical, social, and emotional harm. Yet through **cbm**-supported programmes, mothers can access specialist surgery that restores dignity, hope and freedom.

Encouraged by a neighbour who had been healed, Arziki travelled to a **cbm**-supported specialist hospital.

"I'm hopeful that I will heal from this problem by the grace of God," she said.

At the specialist centre, experienced surgeons successfully performed the delicate repair.

"I am now healed... I'm very excited, I'm happy. I no longer suffer from the fistula problem," Arziki says.

With healing came the return of everyday freedoms.

"I'm now happy I can perform every domestic chore without restriction," Arziki shared. Grateful for those who made her recovery possible, she offered a prayer of thanks.

Many mothers still suffer, unaware that treatment exists. With your help, women like Arziki can find healing. You can help turn ashes into beauty.

Please prayerfully consider a gift today by scanning the QR code, donating securely at www.cbmnz.org.nz/fistula-nigeria or call **0800 77 22 64**.



New Zealand Must Stand for Life

Gillian Southey

"Resilience (Sumud) is our way of existing. We refuse to be victims, and we refuse to hate. We choose to stay, to love, and to demand our right to be free." Kairos II

While global attention focused on the continuing consequences of the Israel and United States conflict with Iran, Israel passed

new legislation that sharpens the discrimination against Palestinians living on the West Bank and the Israelis who have settled on Palestinian lands despite resolutions made by the United Nations over many years.

Passed on 30 March, the legislation [mandates](#) the death penalty for any Palestinian who kills an Israeli 'with the intent to negate the existence of the State of Israel' by hanging within 90 days. The decision requires majority but not unanimous agreement and has no right of appeal. Foreign Minister Winston Peters [expressed](#) "deep concern" over the bill and New Zealand's long standing opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. The Green Party unsuccessfully tried to introduce legislation condemning the bill in parliament.

The last person executed by Israel was Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1961 for crimes against humanity.

On 17 April, Palestinians and supporters [marked](#) Palestinian Prisoners Day in solidarity with more than 9,600 people including 342 children under the age of 18 held in custody. Palestinians of all ages are subject to a military legal system which means that they can be held in administrative detention, without charge or trial for six month periods. Approximately one third of the current prison population are held under this form of detention which can be renewed. Israel is the only country that tries children in military courts. Israelis are tried under a separate civilian system. B'tselem, the Israeli Human rights monitor [reports](#) that at least 1,050 Palestinians have been killed on the West Bank since the October 2023 attack while more than 72,000 people have died in Gaza. More than 2,500 people [have](#) been killed by Israeli airstrikes in the south of Lebanon since the ceasefire was declared.

A young Palestinian Christian, Layan Nasir [is](#) one of many Palestinians held in custody allegedly for her membership in a student group. Christians around the world continue to pray for her release and for others held without justice. Last year's [Kairos II](#) statement of Palestinian Christians highlights the differentiated legal processes that are part of the Israeli apartheid system.

A photo of an Israeli soldier [attacking](#) a statue of the crucifixion of Jesus in Lebanon, highlighted the opposition to Palestinian Christians. The war against Gaza has not ended but has intensified in the West Bank and southern Lebanon, leaving the civilian population short of food, safety and shelter. The United Nations continues to report on the multiple challenges Gaza faces from the priority needs for food, shelter and water to the 61 million tonnes of [rubble](#) to be removed or recycled to their rights to their land and dignity.

On April 27, the Stockholm Peace Research Institute [reported](#) a real terms increase of 2.9% in global military expenditure for 2025 compared with 2024. Last year nations spent US\$2887 trillion, despite cuts in the largest budget of the USA. New Zealand [budgeted](#) more than NZ\$9 billion for defence last year.

Like the Palestinians, we need to do more to resist the machinery of death.