

Pacific Islanders' Synod

Report

This report covers work by the Pacific Islanders' Synod for the period March 2006 – July 2006. In March a small team from within the Synod's executive was appointed and empowered as a Business Committee to steer the Synod's business. It also covers ongoing work after the annual conference of Synod on 21 and 22 July 2006.

The Committee implemented changes, new focus and direction for the Synod. The Business Committee team have adopted processes which allow the team to move forward with passion and commitment to succeed.

At the Synod's annual conference on 21 and 22 July 2006, a new Moderator and new members were appointed to the Business committee. There is enthusiasm and commitment in the new Moderator and new members to the Business Committee, to continue to move forward and to maintain the theme of our annual conference 'Excellence and Success'.

Vision of the Pacific Island Synod

1.1 There is a shared vision, albeit unwritten, encapsulated in the following:

The vision:

1.2 The Synod provides a common place for brothers and sisters in Christ from the Pacific nations who belong to the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to work in solidarity in God's work.

'In Christ, we are all one and we are all equal'.

Thus any real or perceived difference in culture, race, language, status or hierarchy is not a bar to working, sharing and engaging in love, trust, mutual respect and understanding, in a journey of faith within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.3 The Pacific Island Synod is a recognised body within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and it is subject to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The Pacific Island Christian Presbyterian Community including the Pacific Island Synod, is a partner in the Presbyterian Church. It is easy to comprehend this partnership when the Presbyterian Church is a big extended family, with the Synod being one 'clan' of the extended family. The vision statement above recognises all Pacific Nations including New Zealand, within the Presbyterian Church, engaging in the journey of faith. That is a good start but we recognise that we have a long journey ahead.

Membership of the Pacific Island Synod is Diverse

1.1 There is diversity in cultural understanding, ethnicity, language and perceived hierarchy within the Pacific Island Synod. We share commonality in the fact that our recent forebears are migrants from the Pacific region. The Pacific however includes New Zealand. 'We are one in Christ'. We are members of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

- 1.2 The Constituent groups within the Synod include the Cook Islands – Uapou Fellowship, Niueans - Fono Motu, Samoans – Fono Samoa, Tokelauans – Fono Tokelau, Tuvaluans – Fono Tuvalu. We recognise, as a migrant community, that we have children and generations who are Pacific by heritage but do not speak Pacific languages. We cater for this uniqueness by way of our English-speaking group. Our children are included in the Synod and they have a choice of being a member through the ethnic speaking groups, or if she or he is Kiwi with Pacific heritage, he/she can join the English-speaking group.
- 1.3 Membership is open to anyone who is a member of the constituent groups within the Synod and who is also a member of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Growth within the Constituent Groups of the Synod

- 1.1 Data from our constituent groups indicates membership of the Pacific Island churches continues to grow.
- 1.2 The Synod has a dual role, which is similar to the dual role of local churches. The Synod provides a national focal point for spiritual work and for the Pacific community to come together in unity. The local church within each constituent of Synod is a place of worship and it is also a centre that replaces the village structures that Pacific migrants are familiar with, but have left behind in their homeland. In recognising the duality of roles by Synod, a new structure of office holders has been adopted by the Business Committee. Two persons share the role of clerk. One deals with matters of faith, the second deals with properties, legal and financial issues. Attendance at presbytery meetings, Council meetings is shared by agreement of the co-clerks. In dealing with finances of the Synod, there are two treasurers sharing the duties for the same reasons. Underlying these changes is the fact that all are volunteers with jobs to attend to and families to feed. The aim of the system is to foster ongoing dialogue with all courts of the churches, other congregations who may seek help or support of Synod, and provide service for our members in a transparent and efficient way. We have a paid part time administrator at present. The Synod wishes to maintain the services of a paid administrator for the efficient running of Synod business.

Achievements and Progress

- 4.1 We recognise with gratitude the achievements, hard work and determination of our members that established the Pacific Island Synod.
- 4.2 For the Synod to progress, all Synod members needed commitment, hard work and sharing of talents and skills to achieve a common goal. There was enthusiasm along this path shown by the majority of the Synod members who were present at our annual conference in July. This enthusiasm has been expressed in writing and by many phone calls that the Business Committee received post conference.
- 4.3 The lead by the Business Committee has provided new vision, hope, courage and determination to Synod members. There is much to be done to achieve excellence and success. The Business Committee members are committed to turn excellence and success to a reality. Synod is greatly encouraged in this positive move forward by the warm support, guidance and encouragement from various members of the Presbyterian Church. In particular, we acknowledge

with gratitude the assistance of the Rev Dr Kerry Enright, of General Assembly, Kerry Stotter, John Trainor and the Rev John Daniel of the Council of Assembly, the Rev Ma'afala Koko and the Rev David Clark of Auckland Presbytery.

- 4.4 It would be wrong to say that the work of the Business Committee in the past few months has been plain sailing. Members of the committee have experienced frustration and despondency at times. We have seen and witnessed frustrations from office holders of various courts within Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand that we have worked closely with. Yet within that, a seed of hope has been sown. There have been intentional meetings of members of the Pacific Synod and office holders of the Presbyterian Church, the Rev Dr Kerry Enright and Kerry Stotter especially, both have actively encouraged open dialogue. The Presbyterian Church and Synod must continue in open dialogue. This strengthens ties and nurtures an environment of understanding, trust, and working in true partnership to build a community of faith that embraces our diversity and utilises differences to mutual benefit in multicultural New Zealand. We also urge a culture of transparency and accountability in all dealings between the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific Island Synod.
- 4.5 Within the Auckland region, there has been frustration in our dealings with the Auckland Presbytery. Equally, Auckland Presbytery's office holders have been frustrated when they are taken to task for making decisions affecting the Pacific Island Synod members, without consulting the Pacific Island Synod. In the midst of chaos, new levels of understanding and dialogue have begun to ensure that Auckland Presbytery and the Pacific Island Synod work in 'partnership' based on trust, mutual respect and understanding. Again transparency and accountability in all dealings between Auckland Presbytery and Synod is encouraged. We now have an understanding that will be built on.
- 4.6 The new Moderator and Business Committee elected in July 2006 engage in regular early morning weekly meetings. A seed has been sewn for true partnership in God's work for The Presbyterian Church and Synod. We must together ensure that the seed grows to a flourishing Pohutukawa at the next Assembly meeting in 2008.
- 4.7 The Synod Business Committee has prepared and presented reports to the last two meetings of the Council of Assembly, in Wellington. Our voice on the Council has been heard with support and encouragement. I see a way forward along this path.
- 4.8 The Synod Business Committee has diligently responded to correspondence that came in. We have also written many letters, emails and faxes on behalf of the Synod. We cannot say with confidence that we have responded promptly to all. Within the confines of voluntary workers, we have done well.
- 4.9 The Synod Business Committee members met with Te Aka Puaho and reaffirmed links and expressed the Synod's desire to work in the spirit of kinship with Te Aka Puaho.
- 4.10 The Synod through its Business Committee have reaffirmed links with Pacific Council of Churches (PCC) in Fiji and have expressed the Synod's support for putting forward the Moderator of Te Aka Puaho for the position of Moderator of PCC in the future.

The aim of synod to be a court of the Presbyterian Church:

- 1.1 The proposed Court for the Synod – is in reality nowhere near ready to be presented to Council of Assembly or to the General Assembly. Much work is needed in forward planning, budgeting, and defining the rules and regulations that govern the procedures and operations within. Synod's Executive Committee and its Business Committee need to define the parameters of authority of persons who may be involved. There is much work to be done. In our last annual conference in July, we invited all our members to discuss and tell us what their views are for a court of the Synod. The Business Committee are collating this information and the relevant views expressed will form part of the planning of this court. We are hindered by having no resources to get professional surveys and reports to set up something of this magnitude. The canvassing of opinions of members was a good start and we shall build on that.

Reflection Centre Project

- 1.1 A desire to have a Reflection Centre for the Pacific Synod, provided impetus for an application by the Synod to Council of World Mission (CWM) – limited funds from CWM for Synod's Reflection Centre, have been held in trust by the Presbyterian Church until recently.
- 1.2 The Synod's Business Committee refocused its original plan for the Reflection Centre and presented to Assembly Executive Secretary an amended plan. This meeting set in motion the process for remitting the funds from CWM, held by the Presbyterian Church, to Synod. The parties agreed that the funds will be transferred to a trust bank account, specifically for the Reflection Centre.
- 1.3 Synod's Business committee are currently looking for a central place in Auckland in the vicinity of Karangahape Road to rent for the Synod's office. From that office, we will continue to find ways to further fund raise to make the Reflection Centre a reality.
- 1.4 Finally, we realise that to succeed we need to accept a true working together of theologians and professionals in other fields. The Church is about the spiritual life and real life. That duality is captured under the subheading 'purpose' in the Synod's constitution. The real 'life' of the church within our multicultural society needs compliance with New Zealand law and laws of the Church. The real 'life' is about having money and resources for betterment of the Synod and the Presbyterian Church generally.

Way forward for the Pacific Island Synod

- 1.1 There is hope, there is vision. There is willingness to continue to engage in open and transparent dialogue.
- 1.2 The non-response from the Synod to various courts of the church caused by previous inaction for whatever reason, is only relevant as background information for the Synod. It provided a platform for setting procedures and working relationships to ensure what happened in the past is not repeated.
- 1.3 There are clearly problems in defining the parameters of the word 'partnership' in the relationship of the General Assembly and various courts of the Presbyterian Church and the Pacific Synod. There has been progress made in

the past few months but there is much more dialogue needed to clarify this term.

- 1.4 Similarly, there are problems that have affected the work of the Synod relating to the use of the word 'confidential' to office holders of the Synod by office holders of courts of the Church without defining the parameters of what needs to be kept confidential and what is outside that term. It is acknowledged that misunderstandings are unintentional. Nevertheless a solution to this problem is beneficial to the work of The Presbyterian Church and its various courts in its dealing with the Pacific Synod.
- 1.5 The Synod observes that there is urgent need for improvement in communicating issues relating to sexual misconduct procedures.. Whilst the need for confidentiality is necessary to protect people concerned, others suffer in the process, by delays. There must be prompt and clear instructions to the respondents concerned of what he/she can or cannot do; and prompt communication of this instruction to the Synod and the congregation affected will protect all affected parties.
- 1.6 Synod realises the importance of timeliness. For example, we did not have the input we desired into the new Book of Order and wish to address this for the 2008 Assembly. We have capable lay people who have expertise in some areas and who can contribute as much as ministers.

Conclusion

- 3.1 There have been problems experienced by the Pacific Island Synod as explored above. A positive way forward has been established. Ongoing dialogue and working in true partnership of all Courts of the Presbyterian Church and the Pacific Island Synod will reinforce and build on the positive steps taken this far.
- 3.2 An image, perhaps an old-fashioned Pacific one, is of a brown hand holding a white hand and in turn holding a yellowish brown hand, repeating the grace of God in unison! We need to put a stop to misunderstandings caused by unintentional talking past each other.
- 3.3 Galatians 3: 26 'for in Jesus Christ we are all sons [and daughters] of God through faith. In verse 28: 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. May God bless us all.

Soifua ma ia Manuia

Leulua'iali'i Olinda Woodroffe

Clerk of the Pacific Island Synod
(A shared role)

Rev Maheu Papau

Former Moderator

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