

Spanz

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

SUMMER 2012, ISSUE 52

Young
gardeners:
benefactors and promoters
of community gardens

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The ecological crisis: a Christian response

In October, the conference “Christianity and the Ecological Crisis: Lament, Hope, Action” was held at St John’s in the City Presbyterian Church in Wellington. One hundred and sixty people attended, including seven Church-goers who entered our draw for free registrations. This ecumenical and collaborative event, jointly organised by A Rocha, Caritas and the University of Otago’s Centre for Theology and Public Issues, reflected on the increasing evidence that our planet is imperilled.

Awareness that industrialised modern civilisation is having deleterious effects on the health of the Earth is not new. It is 50 years since Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* highlighted the impact pesticides have on the health of ecosystems, thereby sparking modern-day environmentalism. In the last half century the evidence of ecological woe has continued to grow: deforestation, over-fishing, ocean acidification, habitat destruction, the poisoning and polluting of freshwater supplies and most recently, the frightening recognition that our energy-intensive lifestyles are changing the very climate of our planet.

What are the causes of the predicament our planet is in? And, most importantly, how should we, as Christians, respond?

The reason we find ourselves in this situation is largely due to our failure as humanity to recognise that we live on a *finite* planet with ecological limits. Professor Jonathan Boston, in a sobering and at times traumatic overview of the current ecological health of the planet, noted at the conference that, like the human body, God’s good Earth can only cope with certain levels of abuse and mistreatment. Professor Boston identified nine global systems critical to the planet’s health and therefore the health and wellbeing of all life. Of these, three (bio-diversity loss, the nitrogen cycle and climate change) are already beyond safe limits.

The current loss of bio-diversity - the extinction of creatures created by God - is particularly alarming. Close to one

third of all species are threatened with extinction. While there have been other mass extinction events during the history of our planet (the last, 65 million years ago, saw the demise of dinosaurs and many other creatures) what distinguishes this impending event is that it is largely human-induced.

It would be easy to blame others for the state that we find ourselves in. But as Anglican Bishop Justin Duckworth reminded those gathered at the conference, we are all “addicts”, notably to consumer products and fossil fuels.

In 1955 marketing guru Victor Lebow wrote: “...our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption a way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption...we need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate”.

Pope Benedict captured this thought in his inaugural mass in 2005. “The external deserts in the world are growing because our internal deserts have become so vast.” Accordingly it is both appropriate and necessary that our first response should be lament for our misplaced *desire* which seeks spiritual satisfaction in that which cannot truly satisfy; lament for our failure to be faithful stewards of the Earth that God has commissioned us to care for.

And what of hope? Confronting a bleak and uncertain future with fewer species, a less temperate climate, and (probably) increasing human misery and conflict, in what should we put our trust? Secular optimists (to give them a label) suggest that human ingenuity will be our saviour. But science and technology is a double-edged sword. Indeed, conference attendees were reminded that Christian hope lies not in the secular-humanist “progress myth”, but in the faithfulness of the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all creation, and the promise that all things are being reconciled in Christ.



Dr Andrew Shepherd

But if this is the case, what should lives based on this hope look like? Speakers at the conference offered a number of suggestions. These coalesced around some simple themes. Ultimately, if the ecological crisis is first and foremost a moral crisis, then we need to change our pattern of living. We need to repudiate our addiction to consumer goods and fossil fuels and rediscover our call to simplicity and the contemplative life.

Grounded in local contexts and in community, we are summoned again to ancient life-giving and Earth-renewing practices such as observing the Sabbath, fasting, gardening, and familiarising ourselves with the creatures with which we share our local environment. A growing intimacy with the Earth from which we are created, in which we are embedded, and upon which we depend, connects us again to the Creator God who creates, sustains and redeems all matter. Such a focus on simplicity in Christ can renew and transform lives, congregations and communities, and will be a signpost of hope in a time of crisis.

Dr Andrew Shepherd is the Education Coordinator for A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, a Christian conservation organisation. He was the chair of the “Christianity and the Ecological Crisis: Lament, Hope, Action” conference.

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Correction

The Spring edition of Spanz magazine (Three decades of Spiritual Growth Ministries) stated that the Rev Dr John Franklin is retired. John is not retired; he is chaplain to Dunedin's Anglican bishop and remains active in spiritual direction and supervision.

Cover Photograph

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MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

The Right Rev Ray Coster contributes a regular column to *Spanz*



Christmas. Birth. A baby. As I write this Christmas article I have just received a call from London to say that my sixth grand-child has been born! I have all the emotional feelings associated with birth: excitement, relief, joy, gratitude...

I recently watched a program from the UK called "One Born Every Minute" – a program about childbirth. One of the midwives made the comment, "When a mother comes in here she must leave her dignity at the door and pick it up again on her way out."

Dignity. Childbirth. Jesus entered the world with no dignity. His parents were not married when he was conceived. He was born in an animal stable. He was a refugee only days after his birth. About 30 years later he died with even less dignity – crucified as traitor, abandoned by all, naked on a cross. Shamed.

As John Ortberg in his wonderful book, *Who is this Man?* shows, the Christmas story is the contrast of two kings. Herod and Jesus. One was considered to have dignity, the other none. One was called Herod the Great. No-one called Jesus great. The lives of these two kings intersected when some other so-called "kings from the East" went to the one with dignity looking for the one who was perceived to have none. But by the end of the second chapter of Matthew, Herod the Great has become Herod the Dead.

Now, as we look back through history we see that the one who claimed more dignity than others had no more than anyone else. We also see that the child in the manger who was perceived to have no dignity was not only full of dignity – he was the giver of dignity! When Jesus looked at people he saw the image of God. He saw this in everyone. It caused him to treat each person with dignity. This was the idea to which that little baby in the manger was heir.

This is the message of the resurrection faith – all people matter to God. But as the Scriptures show there is a really tender spot in the heart of God for the poor and needy and the vulnerable. People of the resurrection, like the living God they worship, work for justice and seek righteousness. And so each Christmas as we remember the birth of the child who was accorded no dignity, we too look for ways of blessing and helping people whose circumstances have destroyed their dignity.

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... the Christmas
story is the contrast
of two kings.
Herod and Jesus.

I encourage you to support the CWS Christmas Appeal again this year – a tradition New Zealand churches started in 1945. But even more, look for ways of giving dignity to all people, especially those who have had dignity taken from them – locally, nationally and internationally. This is the gift of the Christ Child that we, his followers still embrace in our work of mission today.

A woman leaving a birthing unit in one of our modern cities may very easily pick up her dignity as she walks out the door. But sadly it is not that easy for many people to regain their dignity after it has been destroyed by our systems and structures. As resurrection people we want to stand with them at all times, and especially in the Christmas season.

May you have a very blessed Christmas.

Parishioner shares gift of gardening with schools

Eighty-two year old Avis Leeson from St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton has a big dream - to teach every child in New Zealand how to grow vegetables.

Six years ago while being treated for a life threatening illness she decided to bring together her love for gardening and her love for children.

Avis read a lot about the high cost of living for many New Zealanders struggling to feed their families on a tight budget, and about children crippled with obesity and diabetes and "falling off the rails" because they do not have a focus. She was struck by the thought that these things didn't happen when she was young and maybe it has something to do with the food people are eating.

With no time to waste Avis formed a plan to approach local schools and offer her help. Within six years she has assisted more than 50 schools in Hamilton set up gardens.

Teaching others how to have green fingers earned her the 2009 Gardener of the Year for the Waikato and Bay of Plenty region. But she admits that because of her age her vocation has been a challenge.

"When I started doing this it was really heavy going. Because gardening wasn't a subject that was available on the school programme I had to teach it during lunch time. But it's much easier now because it has been so successful. All I have to do is ring up the school and they fit it in, even in school time."

Avis's programme for schools is both simple and practical.





Children from St Andrew's Presbyterian who helped Avis to plant a community garden at the church.

Each day Avis and the school children work together to prepare an area for gardening. The following week they plant seeds and place labels to identify the vegetables. The children then take over and look after the garden.

"That's the whole point of the exercise, that they learn how to plant vegetables. Currently about 75 percent of the children I teach have their own garden at home which is really amazing because when I started none of them had gardens at home.

"Gardening really is very straightforward. People think it's complicated and too difficult so they just don't bother doing it. But in actual fact it's just working with nature," Avis says.

St Andrew's Middle School in Hamilton is one of the schools Avis has touched with her green wand and Principal Tanya Thompson says the school has been inspired and enriched ever since.

"Gardening was something we had been looking into and when Avis volunteered to come work with our kids I thought it was just fantastic," Tanya enthuses.

She says a gardening group of about 30 work on the garden in groups of 10 and Avis drops in now and then to check on how the kids are doing.

"The kids love it. It's a really neat opportunity to work with people in the community and also teach the kids how to grow vegetables."

Another school which is living Avis's dream is David Street School in Morrinsville.

Principal Brian Harrop says Avis "just came to visit one day" and told him she wanted to teach the kids to develop a love for gardening.

"So we got a gardening group together and gave them an area of the school. They planned it, they built it and now we have vegetable gardens, eight fruit trees and a worm farm.

"We've heard that she is not able to do as much these days and we haven't seen much of her but the gardens have continued which I think is testament to her," Brian says.

Many parents struggle to get their children and teens to eat vegetables but Avis has found that getting them to plant their own has changed their perspective and their taste buds.

"They will eat anything that they take possession of. They plant it, they water it, they care for it, and when it grows, they can't wait to eat it. It's absolutely amazing."

With the gardens such a success Avis has branched out and started growing fruit trees in school grounds, so far planting about 300 plum, apple, peach, nectarine and pear trees.

She says the philosophy is simple: get children involved and they will start having fruit every day.

"I thought, in five years' time those schools will have enough fruit growing in their own backyard that they won't have to buy anything and the children will be able to have fruit every day," Avis says.

Now that the work of gardening is becoming too much for the 82-year-old she is desperate to pass on her vision to others who can keep her dream alive.

Her biggest fear is that all her hard work will crumble when she is no longer able to be its guiding force.

She still hopes to have the strength and energy to be able to train volunteers to teach children to plant vegetables. When her time comes she says, "I want to drop dead in a pumpkin patch not sitting on a rocking chair!"

Avis says she would welcome anyone who wishes to become a garden volunteer and she would like to encourage grandparents in particular to offer their time.

"Just seeing the joy in those little children's eyes light up for the first time is worth it. There is so much sadness in the world and I get the feeling that some of them are not loved to the same extent we were when we were children. And that's part of the reason I feel that maybe older volunteers would have bigger hearts and wouldn't expect so much from the children."

None of the congregations in Avis's area have volunteered yet to help with her gardening projects. And while the Red Cross has offered to try to find volunteers few have been found. So, if you'd like to become a volunteer and help children learn the gift of gardening, please phone Avis on (07) 8525783.

Green thumbs up to churches with gardens

Many parishes around the country, including those profiled below, have established successful community gardens. These gardens have enabled them to connect their congregations with their communities, including local schools. With the warmer weather as an incentive to get active outside, a community garden could be an idea your parish looks at exploring.



Peter and Ruth Mears from St Albans, Christchurch, working in the church's garden where they grow potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, rhubarb and tomatoes.

Chartwell Cooperating Church in Hamilton

Members of the church's community garden group began exploring the idea for a shared garden with their neighbour, the Miropiko Te Kohanga Reo, earlier this year after the Maori language preschool expressed the need for one.

After discussions with the staff of the preschool the decision was made to build two raised vegetable garden beds and the creation of the garden was planned to coincide with the Maori New Year celebration, Matariki, on 29 June.

Members of the Miropiko community also helped the church's garden group build the garden beds.

Now the gardens are established children from the preschool help with planting and are taught about composting, worms and the care of plants.

A further initiative is being explored to use the combined gardening knowledge of the group to establish a demonstration garden on one of the Kohanga Reo family properties. They hope to use the garden to demonstrate how growing your own vegetables can offer savings to the family budget.

St Lukes Union Church in Masterton

A joint community garden project between St Luke's Union Church in Masterton and the Masterton Christian childcare centre has been growing since 2010.

The church has supported the childcare programme since it was set up in 1982. The programme offers socially and economically disadvantaged families low-cost childcare,

social work assistance and education programmes for parents.

A social worker at the centre, Frances Dearnley, says the preschool's children, staff, and some parents helped to make the garden.

Frances says the garden was costly to establish at first but the Wairarapa District Health Board and some local groups helped out. Local business the Men's Shed built compost bins, the local tip gave them compost, and members of St Luke's church helped build the glass house and donated plants.

Frances says the gardening team have learnt how to save money by saving bean seeds, allowing some plants to self-seed and saving plant cuttings.

She says when produce from the garden is ready it is divided into "vegie bags" and sent home with the preschool kids. Usually they get two to three bags a week.

Some members of St Luke's who volunteer for the local food bank are also able to make use of the vegetables for families in need.

Frances says the biggest demand now is for volunteers to help in the garden and keep the weeds down.

St Peter's Presbyterian Church in Mt Wellington

Grant Hopkins from St Peter's Presbyterian Church in Mt Wellington, Auckland, says a year ago he realised how much unused land they had at the back of their church. He suggested setting up a church garden for those in the congregation who didn't have the time to plant their own vegetables.

Grant says he receives assistance with the garden from the congregation when he asks but "I'm my worst enemy because I don't ask".

The garden is 8 by 20 metres and a variety of vegetables are grown including potatoes, garlic, cabbages, courgettes and tomatoes.

Some vegetables are given to the congregation but the bulk are used for an outreach programme the church runs called "cook night" where meals are taken to those in need in the community.

Some vegetables are also given to Presbyterian Support's Family Works to distribute to needy families.

Grant says they would like to give more vegetables out to the congregation so they are working on how to garden on a larger scale.

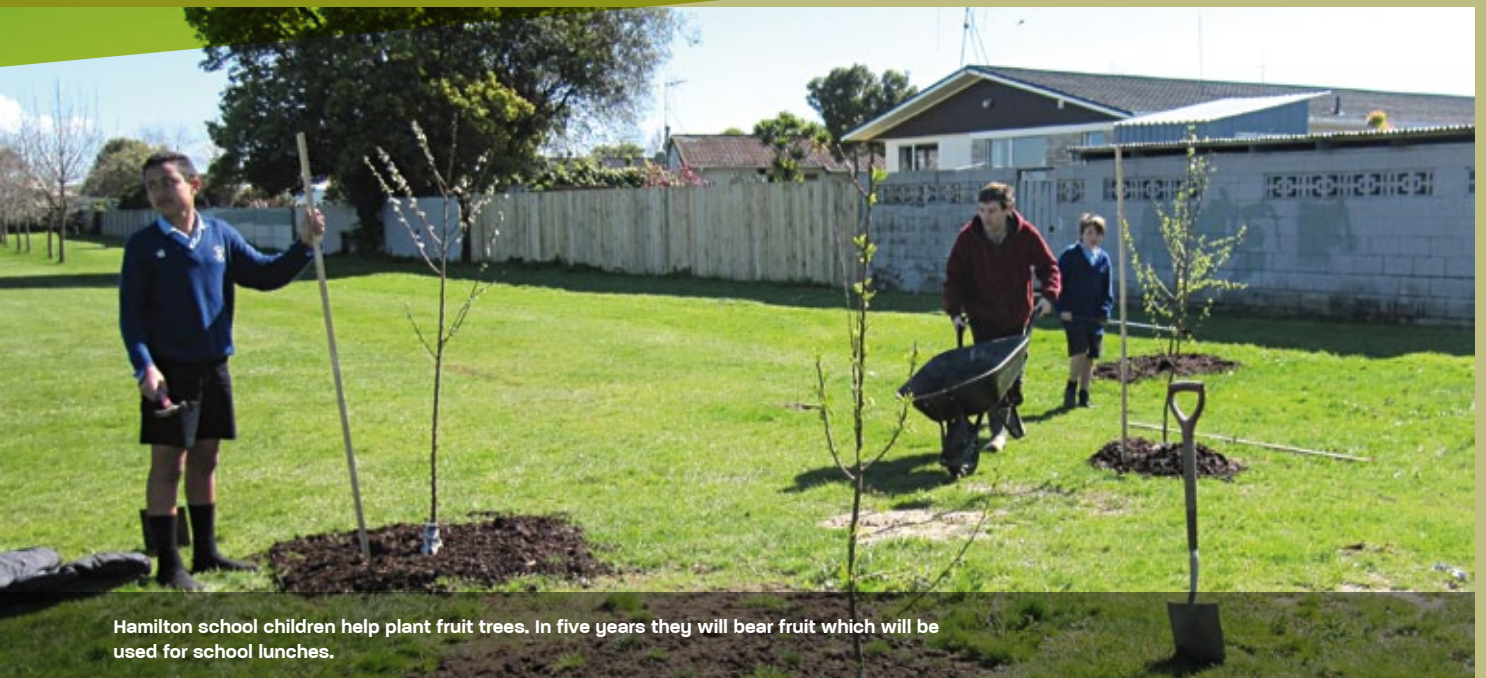
"Our biggest problem is wind and we are trying to work out where most of the wind is coming from. The soil is also not the best and I'm still experimenting with what can be grown," Grant says.

Minister of St Peter's, the Rev Howard Carter, says the garden is going well and he is exploring how to use it as a means to connect more with their community.

St John's Presbyterian Church in Rotorua

St John's decided last year to establish a garden at the back of a residential property belonging to the church. The idea was to grow vegetables to be included in food parcels for the needy, distributed each week from the church's food bank.

The St John's garden coordinator, Heather Dunlop, says the person who left the



Hamilton school children help plant fruit trees. In five years they will bear fruit which will be used for school lunches.

property to the church believed in giving back to the community.

They call the garden “a pantry garden” because its production is used solely for the food bank.

“A working bee was organised last year to clear the land and the garden was created. It was a small garden to start with. We’ve now dug over the whole backyard and most of it is planted,” Heather says.

Vegetables are planted throughout the year so there is always something to harvest in season. Over the past year the garden has produced potatoes, tomatoes, beans, zucchini, cabbage, broccoli, and pumpkins. This year the gardeners hope to increase the quantity and variety of vegetables produced for the food bank.

Volunteers from the church work on the garden and vegetables are picked every Tuesday for food parcels which are distributed the next day.

Heather says it would be a good idea for all parishes to start a communal garden and help to supplement food banks.

St Alban’s Uniting Church in Christchurch

Back in 2010 Peter Mears, a member of St Alban’s, suggested to his church that the best way to tidy up the back section of the church grounds would be to establish a garden.

The church’s minister, the Rev Hugh Perry, says after the usual round of meetings the project began with a planting and barbeque. Anna Mowat, a Presbyterian Support community worker who was using the church complex at the time, invited people from the neighbourhood to help members of the congregation with the garden.

Hugh says Peter and his wife Ruth work tirelessly to keep the garden productive but when Anna moved on to another position

with Presbyterian Support her contacts were lost and the garden has regrettably had minimal contact with the community ever since.

As a result vegetables from the garden - including potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, rhubarb and tomatoes - are distributed to the congregation.

“The garden is magnificent because of Peter and Ruth’s skills and enthusiasm. Peter can’t keep still and likes growing stuff. The vision of involving people in need and teaching gardening skills is still a work in progress,” Hugh says.

The church hasn’t given up on the community garden though. Hugh says now that they have Liz Whithead as their community development worker they are planning other events with the hope of getting more neighbourhood people coming along to a regular garden event every month.

Christine Gounder Spanz

Theology from Otago

Food for thought

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Cold Christchurch receives winter warmth

This year's winter in Christchurch was the coldest for more than a century. But the generosity of caring congregations from opposite ends of the country helped keep people warm.

For a couple of weeks the office of Knox Presbyterian Church in Christchurch was inundated with hand-knitted woollen hats, scarves and blankets made by members of Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church in Remuera, and Windsor Community Church in Invercargill.

Knox minister, the Rev Dr Geoff King, says the winter woollies came at a time when they were needed the most.

"It means a lot to know that people elsewhere are still thinking of us here in Christchurch, and with so many houses being hard to heat because of earthquake damage gifts like these are appreciated as much as they are needed."

Allison Kidd, from Windsor Community Church in Invercargill, says their church became involved in the knitting project "through a contact from our local Association of Anglican Women who was sending children's jerseys to Christchurch following the earthquakes".

"They invited our group to contribute which we did on two occasions towards the end of last year."

Allison is part of a group of 45 women who knit every month for Mission Without Borders which distributes knitting to orphanages in Eastern Europe. The group has contributed hundreds of hats, scarves, jerseys, overalls and peggy square blankets to Operation Cover-up over many years thanks to donations of wool and their busy knitting needles and crochet hooks.

"While the work of Mission Without Borders is one we enjoy supporting, we wanted to do something for those enduring hardship closer to home as well," Allison says.

Margaret Sadler and Pamela Day from St Luke's in Remuera knitted 60 items to send to Christchurch.



Margie Sadler and Pamela Day of St Luke's Presbyterian Church in Remuera knitted 60 items to send to Christchurch

Margaret says she and Pamela had sent a box of knitting to an orphanage in northern Thailand before "but the idea to send stuff to Christchurch came after the minister at Knox in Christchurch came and gave a talk at St Luke's".

"That's when I thought there are children in our own backyard that need help to keep warm. So I decided to send the next lot down to them."

Margaret concentrated on knitting matching scarves and beanies, while Pamela knitted jerseys.

"I knitted scarves that turn up at the end to make pockets so that it can keep fingers warm or keep your handkerchief in."

She made the beanies and scarves to fit anyone. "As long as it fits my head which is, I hope, the average kind of head it should fit anyone."

Pamela says the people of Christchurch deserve any kind of help they can get.

"Along with a lot of New Zealanders we cannot really appreciate what the people of Christchurch have endured and what hardships some families are still experiencing. To be able to help in any way feels very rewarding," she says.

The box of woollies was delivered to Christchurch free of charge by NZ Couriers.

"I called various courier companies but they all said no. Only NZ Couriers said they would send it overnight. So I took them in one afternoon and they said the

box would be there by 8.30am the next morning...and there would be no charge. I was just blown away by their generosity," Margaret says.

Once in Christchurch and at Knox church, Altrusa International Inc, an organisation similar to Rotary, distributed the woollies to deserving homes.

Diane Harrington, the Knox Church secretary and a member of Altrusa, organised the distribution.

"My Altrusa club had last year distributed loads of new woollen goods to several schools, and kindergartens on the east side of Christchurch that had been severely hit by the earthquakes. This time they went to Kiwi Family Trust and Whanau Tautoko Charitable Trust in Christchurch," Diane says.

Geoff says, the people of Christchurch are still going through a lot during the so-called recovery phase, being especially affected by insurance and land classification issues as well as rental price hikes.

He says there is also a lot of ongoing practical need that the City Mission, among others, is trying to help with. He "recommends the Christchurch City Mission highly as an agency deserving of support".

Geoff says there are still plenty of people living in cold, damaged houses who still need warm hats and scarves. Any further help would be gratefully received.

Christine Gounder [Spanz](#)

Presbyterian Army chaplain returns from warzones

Presbyterian minister and army chaplain the Rev Chris Purdie has served in two six-and-a-half month overseas deployments, one in Afghanistan and the other in East Timor. While both are warzones, it is the dangers and tragedies of Afghanistan which feature most in the media.

Ten New Zealand soldiers have been killed so far in Afghanistan and there has been ongoing political debate about pulling New Zealand troops out of Afghanistan in early 2013.

Chris says Afghanistan was for him busier than East Timor. And the cold weather was a challenge.

“Afghanistan winter is something to behold, fine weather but it is minus 25 degrees at night and minus 15 to 18 during the day.”

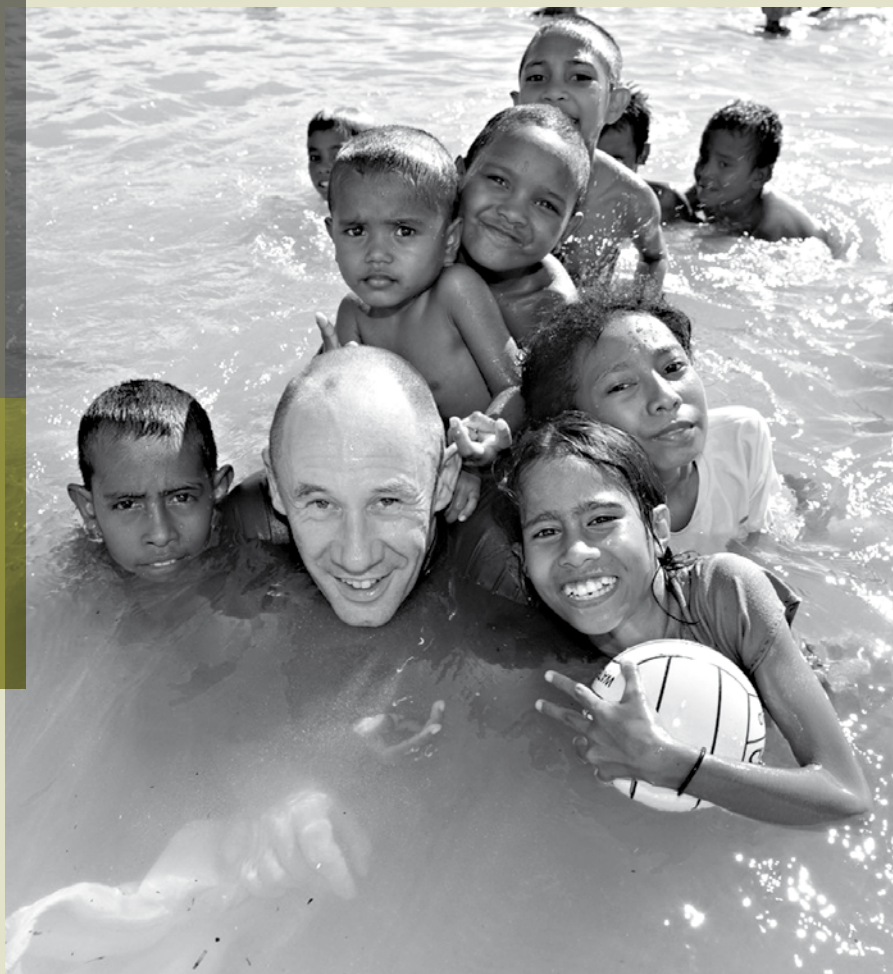
Chris's role in both countries was to provide pastoral care to everyone on deployment. This involved working with people in crisis, as well as those who were dealing with the challenge of being far away during a crisis back at home.

“Our role includes a variety of things. Generally it is a ‘presence ministry’ where we relate to people all the time. And partly it is about checking out how people are. Over time, you notice people who may be feeling down or struggling with the deployment,” Chris says.

“If a soldier is struggling with anything, the chaplain is a port of call where they can come and get things off their chest without fear of reprisal.”

Chris also sees his role as standing up for the oppressed within the military community - helping soldiers get what they need when they need it.

“For example while I was in East Timor at the beginning of this year, a soldier died in Afghanistan. One of our boys in East Timor was his roommate on a previous deployment and he really felt that he



Army chaplain the Rev Chris Purdie spent time with local orphaned children whilst he was stationed in East Timor.

wanted to go to the funeral. We were able to negotiate with the system to get him back to New Zealand to be present.”

He says being a chaplain in the army is not all tragedy. It has its challenges but there are fun times as well. And Christian values like “love thy neighbour” are very evidently present in the military.

“The care soldiers have for each other and the team they are involved in is quite humbling to watch and this extends to after work. For example, when a soldier is sick someone will mow their lawn or fix their car. It's a team bonding thing because at the end of the day they have to rely on each other and watch each others' backs.”

In Afghanistan, Chris taught English to the army's local employees, and in East Timor he worked with children from the local Dominican Orphanage.

Chris says no matter where he is stationed, the chaplain's job is the same.

“I will still talk to people; people need counselling whether they are in Afghanistan or in Linton.”

Army chaplains have the same status as medical surgeons in the army under the Geneva Convention and have weapons to defend themselves and others with.

Chris has not found himself in a situation where he has had to draw his gun to kill an enemy.

“I don't see myself as a true pacifist. Obviously in the military if a chaplain has to draw his weapon many things have gone terribly wrong in the two hours before. So it's not a normal situation.”

“I think as a general principle there are things worth fighting for. There are principles and values that hold a higher place than others and are worth fighting for,” Chris says.

Chris's background before becoming a military chaplain was as a youth worker followed by several years as a lay preacher at Hutt City Uniting Church and then study at what was then called the School of Ministry.

After graduating, he began his chaplaincy work at Linton military camp where he is currently one of three chaplains.

Christine Gounder [Spanz](#)

Earthquakes reshape parish ministry

"We are feeding about 30 families. The most marvellous thing is that when the recipients of these meals are on their feet again, they are the ones making sure everyone else is okay. It's wonderful."

The Rev Sheena Dickson uses the words "marvellous" and "wonderful" repeatedly when describing the way people in her parish, St George's Iona in Linwood on Christchurch's badly damaged east side, are supporting each other.

"We recently had a delivery of 240 hot water bottles, and a group of us took 100 over to the local school. That we were able to bring some kind of joy to these children's lives is just immeasurable. It's marvellous to see how they've blossomed."

After the first earthquake, in September 2010, St George's Church was unusable. The Christmas Eve jolts last year ended services being held at Iona.

"Until it got too cold we were in a marquee. Now we worship in the manse," says Sheena. "It's fun – intimate and cosy. I've asked people how they feel after a year in the manse. Someone said, 'I like the informality of it'. We've always been a close-knit parish, but more so now. Sitting in a congregation can feel distant. We've moved on from that. We are feeling excited about what could happen with the shape of our parish."

The church had started feeding local people in need before the earthquakes. "About four years ago when food prices really started going up someone in the congregation said, 'Why don't we do a lunch?' People in the parish cooked, brought in the food and served it."

"Then the earthquakes came. The oomph went out of people. They were just coping with their own things. But when you went to see how people were you would see they really didn't have enough to keep them going. The first thing that goes is what you can have control over – food. Instead of buying food they bought wood for fires and paid the electricity bills.



A marquee was erected so that the St George's/Iona congregation could gather for services after the Canterbury earthquakes. Iona Church buildings are in the background.

The church now gives out food from the manse – "pasta and sauce, Weetbix, beans on toast for the children. Porridge – boy, does that go. We buy good nourishing food, no fast food or rubbish."

After the first earthquake Sheena says the Christchurch Presbytery put a call out for donations and they poured in – everything from petrol and grocery vouchers to a container load of blankets and duvets from Manawatu.

"Children in Ashburton stuck cards to the wrappings of the blankets they sent. One read, 'We are sorry Christchurch is broken. We are keeping you in our prayers'. It's very emotional for our children to know people are thinking of them. We are no longer big news, but we still know people care about us.

"We are in the hard yards now – coming up to the third Christmas and still living in cold, damaged homes. The majority in the congregation are in the same predicament they were in three Christmases ago. I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard someone say, 'I won't be alive by the time they fix my house' coupled with 'There's a lot of people worse off than I am' – even those with no sewerage or with no water, having water piped in.

"You look around and see the resilience and the stoic attitude. I wish somebody could give them a pat on the back and say, 'You've done so well', but I don't know they'd believe them.

Sheena says the congregation have never lost sight of the fact that "we are all in this together. The networks in the church have been a wonderful saving grace. If someone knows someone's down, they ring. It's these small things that mean a lot to people."

Sheena began studying for ministry in Dundee in 2000, and arrived in New Zealand just five years ago. "I came because a family member was dying. The earthquakes kept me here. You can't walk away. People who'd never set foot in the church before, or hadn't except for high days and holidays, have adopted the parish rather than the parish adopting them. It's their parish. I'm their minister. That in itself has become a privilege.

"It's a different ministry altogether. One never knows what one's ministry is going to be, but never in my wildest dreams would I have thought this would be crisis and community engagement."

For those who would like to reach out and help Sheena suggests, "Give me a call. I never refuse anything".

Jane Tolerton *Spanz*

REGIONAL CONNECT

meets THE need

Young leaders from Otago and Southland got to take part in the Connect experience thanks to a recent regional Connect event held in Gore.

Now in its fourth year the regional event very much takes its inspiration from national Connect, says event organiser, Synod youth adviser Stephanie Redhead.

“We encourage parishes to attend Connect but often they can only afford to send their youth leaders to the national event. And that inevitably means some young people miss out on the equipping, training and inspiration at Connect.

“Our regional Connect is about providing the same atmosphere and vibe as the national event. It’s about inspiring, equipping and training. Having it regionally makes it more accessible for a greater number of people.”

This year in October around 45 people from as far away as Oamaru, Wanaka and Invercargill attended the day-long event.

The day started with morning tea and ended with a spit-roast. In between those present had the opportunity to listen to Steven Silcock, lead pastor of Annesbrook Church, Christchurch. Steven was asked to speak about how leaders can navigate the challenges they face in working alongside young people. He talked about how much leaders could or should share about themselves – about being open and transparent as opposed to putting some boundaries on sharing. He drew on his own experience and shared some deeply personal challenges from his own life during his inspirational keynote address.

After lunch people joined one of nine streamed workshops designed to meet the needs of the different people there – everyone from experienced youth pastors to younger up-and-coming leaders.

With workshop topics like *Mentoring and Along-siding*, *Homer the Heretic and the Case for Church*, *How to Help Girls with Life Controlling Issues* and *Popular Music and Theology: A U2 Case Study*, there was a mixture of serious and light-hearted practical hands-on sessions to appeal to the diverse audience.

First-time regional Connect attendees Nikki and husband Paul Botting from Waiareka-Weston Presbyterian Church in Oamaru have been involved in ministry with children and young people for some time but are reasonably new to their youth leadership roles. They heard about the regional Connect event from their minister and were keen to attend to get some hands-on ideas for running their youth group.

“It was good for us being brand new. It appealed a lot to where we’re at,” Nikki says.

Nikki and Paul decided to take some of their year 12 and 13 youth group helpers to the event to equip and resource them as well.

“Next year we’d love to take twice as many,” says Nikki who felt the event was enormously useful.

The sessions that covered the risks of working with children and young people were especially helpful she said.

“It was great for equipping us in how to deal with sensitive issues, like when a young person discloses something that ideally their parents need to be involved with or know about.

“We left with a lot of stuff we can take back home and use. I really liked the advice from one of the speakers: ‘Don’t focus on the behaviour. Look at the cause of the behaviour’.”

Stephanie believes that youth ministry in Otago and Southland is in a really good space. There are really strong ministries at Calvin and East Taieri, and lots of great stuff developing in other parts of the region, she says.

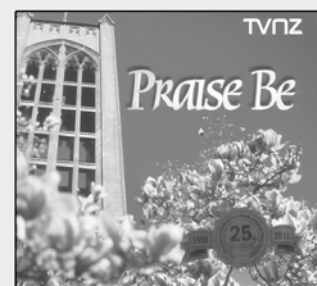
“There is a real vibrancy, a real energy. To me this is exciting. There can be a perception that small rural parishes aren’t involved with young people’s ministry – that’s definitely not the case here.”

Regional Connect will be back next year, says Stephanie, who is assisted in getting the event organised by a small team of dedicated helpers including a former member of Stephanie’s youth group, her husband and youth pastors from Gore. She says a big thanks must also go to the Synod of Otago and Southland who cover the major costs for the event.

By Jose Reader **Spanz**

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Children from Strathmore Community School in Wellington welcome the arrival of computers from the PCANZ Assembly Office.

Small gift of computers makes BIG difference to school

Strathmore Community School in Wellington, a decile 2 school that's been struggling to provide the extra help its students need, has been given 10 flat screen desktop computers. They come from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand's Assembly Office.

The office recently upgraded its computers as most were outdated. Staff were using different versions of operating systems with

resulting compatibility issues. As a result it was decided to give the computers to a local school that needed them.

Strathmore office manager Leanne Quirke says that Strathmore, a multicultural school of about 70 students, couldn't afford to buy new computers. It's been using old slow bulky computers donated to them a few years ago.

"The kids use computers for projects and learning games. The ones they've been using have had a lot of breakdowns and needed ongoing maintenance. We are so lucky to have been given these newer ones which are faster. They will make a huge difference."

Leanne says the children had to wait long periods for their turn on the old computers because they were very slow, so the new ones will increase productivity.

The school receives funding from the Ministry of Education but Leanne says it isn't enough to cover everything.

"We have a lot of children who have English as a second language for example. We have to give them extra learning and pay for teacher aids. Some children haven't gone to preschool either so we have to teach them the basics. The higher decile schools are able to get money for school trips from parents but we can't ask our students' families because they don't have much money to spare," Leanne says.

The school also provides breakfast and lunch for some children who come to school with either nothing or not enough.

"We have three siblings at the moment who have to share a packet of crackers between them for lunch. The kids get grumpy and start fighting when they're hungry."

If anyone would like to help the school, Strathmore gladly accepts clothing for the children but donations of breakfast food are what is most needed.

Leanne says it would be great if businesses like Presbyterian Church could donate their old computers to low decile schools throughout the country.

Brendan Sweeney, Presbyterian Church Finance Manager, says the decision to donate the computers was made because "we knew the computers were not worth very much as second-hand resale. And we didn't want to just give them to an organisation where they would fall into some kind of black hole. We decided that children would receive the most benefit from them so our first choice was a school or homework club."

"We had the computers cleaned of information before they were donated," says Brendan, "so there are no security issues."

Brendan says he would encourage anyone upgrading their IT to contact their local low decile schools if they have surplus equipment in good working order.



Northern Presbytery youth sports day jumps from strength to strength

Now in its sixth year the annual Northern Presbytery youth sports day – known as Replay – is getting bigger and better every year.

The 2012 Olympics-themed event, held on 29 September, attracted around 200 young people from 14 parishes across the greater Auckland area.

Teams played in a series of round-robin games including volleyball, handball, basketball, soccer and noodle hockey (which is exactly as it sounds - normal hockey played with noodles normally found in a swimming pool!) St Paul's Manurewa got bragging rights this year and won the tournament's first ever trophy.

Emily Wotton, former Presbytery youth adviser, had organised the event since its inception in 2007, but this year Tala Page who is the youth and children's ministry co-ordinator at St Andrew's Community Presbyterian Church in Otahuhu stepped into the breach to co-ordinate the event.

Tala marshalled a committee of youth leaders from different churches to come

together to plan and run the event, which she described as "unity in action", which is part of her vision for the event.

She says the idea for the sports day was born out of a PYM Going Somewhere camp in 2007, where she, Emily and others were "keen to create more opportunities to connect with other youth groups".

"Sports and food bring people together," she says. "It's about having a laugh and having some fun, connecting with people."

Salamasina Pese from St Pauls Manurewa agrees saying, "You get to join in fellowship with others, meet with other youth groups, re-connect with those people you've met at other events like regional services or Connect. It's a great atmosphere and heaps of fun."

"Our group absolutely enjoyed the games, had a blast cheering, chanting and laughing and just seeing youth groups come together to just have fun."

St Columba @ Botany's youth director David Hoe said the team of 20 or so people from their church enjoyed the opportunity to connect with other youth groups and play sport.

"It's a different environment and it's refreshing to do something outside the four walls of the church."

This is the first year a team of young people from different parishes have organised and run the event. In future Tala would like to see the Presbytery's youth groups picking up even more responsibility and ownership for making the event happen. Her vision is that each year the winning parish will pick

up the reins and organise the following year's sports day.

Northern Presbytery funded the major costs of the sports day including venue hire, and each person who participates makes a small donation (this year \$3) with all proceeds given to charity. This year around \$550 was donated to Presbyterian Support Northern's Guardian Angel programme.

The annual sports day is one of several opportunities for Auckland's Presbyterian youth groups to connect and build their faith. The monthly regional services – where youth groups take turns at hosting worship – have been in existence for a while and buoyed by the success of the sports day at a recent planning meeting Auckland's youth leaders decided to add other events to the regional youth group calendar.

Tala, who participated in the Northern Presbytery youth leaders' consultation and planning day where that decision was made, said training and support for young leaders was highlighted as a key priority. As a result it is now planned to have one regional fellowship or equipping event every term in 2013 in addition to the existing regional services. There are plans for an equipping workshop where practical ways of using creative arts in mission and ministry with young people will be explored plus a social event at the end of the year as well as the sports day.

The date for next year's Replay sports day is already booked and judging by the popularity of this year's event, there will be no shortage of teams ready to join in. Game on!

By Jose Reader [Spanz](#)



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THEOLOGYMATTERS

The Marriage Amendment Bill currently before parliament has sparked a lot of discussion about marriage.

How are we to understand marriage from a Christian perspective?

For many people, it's a no-brainer: marriage combines the complementary characteristics of men and women as defined by nature, mandated by Scripture, and embedded in most cultures and religions around the world. It is part of the very order of Creation, established and ordained by God for the structuring of intimate male-female relations and the procreation of children. End of story.

But hold on a minute! Even though Jesus appears to uphold this traditional view in his response to a question about divorce, when he quotes the words from Genesis about a man and woman becoming "one flesh" (Matthew 19:6), at other times in his teaching he seems to suggest that marriage isn't quite what we assume it to be. For example, in Luke 14:26 Jesus tells his would-be followers that in order to follow him they must hate their families, including their wives and children.

Hating your spouse? Really? Is this what Christian marriage is about?

Jesus' teaching here is consistent with the advice he gives a young man who would postpone the call to discipleship until he has seen to the funeral of his father to "let the dead bury their own dead" (Luke 9:60).

What Jesus is saying in these apparent displays of indifference is that our most pressing family obligations and social institutions, including marriage, are now subordinated to the call to discipleship. It's not that they're suddenly rendered unimportant; it's just that they no longer exist in and for themselves; the claims which they make upon our lives must now give way to, and be informed by a higher allegiance, a deeper calling.

It is for this reason that the Church considers the institution of marriage to serve not only the emotional and physical needs of the couple but also the wellbeing of society. It has effectively been commandeered by our Lord to advance the Kingdom of God, to be a sign of the Kingdom.

How might it serve this purpose?

First and foremost, I would suggest that the Christian home is meant to be a place where faith is encouraged, nurtured and

strengthened, where partners in marriage encourage one another in their respective and mutual calls to serve God with heart, souls and minds.

Understood in this way, love does not draw a circle around the couple, isolating them from the needs of others, turning them in upon themselves. Rather, it turns them towards the world with a generosity of spirit, confident that the love they share is grounded in, and flows from a God who so loved the world and gave God's only begotten son, so that whosoever believes in God shall not perish but have eternal life.

To this end, the Christian home is meant to be a place of hospitality, a place of welcome, echoing the hospitality of our Lord, who dined with sinners and ushered people into the Kingdom without discrimination.

Such is the hospitality of God, experienced afresh each time we gather around the communion table. At its best, the Christian home is an extension of this Eucharistic hospitality, a sign of God's kingdom.

One of the benefits of placing marriage in the context of discipleship is that it levels the vocational playing field between marriage and singleness, and between having children and being childless. The call to discipleship can be heard and responded to whether one is married or single, with children or without children.

According to the Bible, marriage is not an end in itself. Comparatively little is said in it about marriage and about wedding ceremonies as such, and what is said is often couched in very functional language – eg, 1 Corinthians 7:9, where Paul says that "It is better to marry than be aflame with passion". The Bible seems to have little regard for the romantic ideal that accompanies the modern wedding ceremony. And few of the passages in the Bible that we cherish for their commentary on love and commitment were written with marriage in mind – 1 Corinthians 13 being the classic example.

All this compels us to reflect more deeply on marriage from a faith perspective. And if the Marriage Amendment Bill prompts us to do this, surely this can only be a good thing. We have nothing to fear and much to gain.

– By Graham Redding, Principal of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

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General Assembly embraces "Reviving the Flame" theme

In early October, Presbyterians gathered at Ohope Marae and in Rotorua to spend four days making decisions, hearing presentations and participating in worship.



Commissioners listen to a proposal during GA12 at Rotorua Boys' High School.

General Assembly 2012 began on Thursday 4 October with a powhiri and service of worship at the Church's national Ohope Marae, attended by over 400 people. The Assembly was last held at the marae in 1984. Those present were full of praise for the hospitality shown by Te Aka Puaho, which included a wonderful hangi lunch.

When business began at Rotorua Boys' High School there were some technical audio visual problems, these did not dampen attendees' appreciation of the worship led by the Rev Malcolm Gordon, nor lessen appreciation of the exceptional food and hospitality.

People spoke enthusiastically about sermons by the new Moderator, the Right Rev Ray Coster; addresses by the keynote speaker pastor Tim Keel; and a heart felt address by the Rev Wayne Te Kaawa, moderator of Te Aka Puaho, in support of the Pacific Islands Synod seeking presbytery status.

In his opening sermon as Moderator, the Right Rev Ray Coster challenged the Church "to rise up in mission".

Expanding on his "Reviving the Flame" moderatorship theme he said God is calling the Church "to live in the world and go to the world with a resurrection mind-set".

"A resurrection mindset looks forward and outward to what might be in hope for other people, rather than inwards and downwards. It leads to a heart of service. It leads to a sacrifice of self for the welfare of others. It leads us into mission.

"Friends, we are a Sunday people. Not by accident, but through God's intent. We are an Easter people who celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Not only do we celebrate the resurrection, but even more

we affiliate with it, identify with it, join it, and give ourselves to it."

In his sermon on the final day of Assembly, Ray spoke on self-esteem, Christian identity and finding true inner freedom.

"We are a Church with the burning flame as our symbol. It is my conviction that the flame is always being revived when we enable and help one more person to live with a resurrection mind-set; when we give one more person true inner freedom to step out of the courtroom of condemnation. When that happens, the flame burns brighter. When that happens the Church moves forward in mission, love and service."

Much of Assembly was taken up by business as the meeting worked into the evenings through a series of reports. Decisions included the adoption of the Kupu Whakapono and Commentary as subordinate standards of the Church along with its historic Reformed standards; the adoption of a new formula, by which ministers, elders and office bearers make themselves accountable to the Church; proposed supplementary provisions that would enable the release of 10 percent of net proceeds from building sales to a Mission Enterprise Fund be sent to presbyteries and congregations for discussion; the establishment of a process whereby CoA consults with presbyteries as it considers matters that will be brought to General Assembly; agreement that Assembly remain biennial, that commissioners be selected on membership numbers, rather than by congregation, and support for an "Assembly Week"; encouragement of church leaders to actively train and support those who work with children and to advocate for vulnerable children; advocacy

for climate change refugees in the Pacific; and affirmation of, and support for, the Living Wage campaign.

An issue that attracted much discussion and debate during Assembly were proposed changes to sexuality rules.

After hearing several proposals (*see GA12 webpage for details*), Assembly 2012 affirmed the decisions of previous General Assemblies, that those in relationships outside a faithful marriage between a man and woman, were inappropriate persons to be considered as church leaders.

At the end of the debates, Moderator, the Right Rev Ray Coster led Assembly in prayer and acknowledged the strong feelings on both sides of the issue. He asked that the Church continue to "focus on the things that unite us and bring us together".

Another issue that attracted much discussion was same-sex marriage.

Assembly upheld the traditional Christian understanding that marriage is between a man and a woman. Assembly further stated that it didn't support same-sex marriage and that the Church would ask the government not to pass the proposed amendments to the Marriage Act, currently being considered by parliament.

One decision that gained Assembly's overwhelming support was the granting of presbytery status to the Pacific Islands Synod. The Synod now has status and powers equivalent to a presbytery, and can govern and self-manage its contribution to the life of the Church.

The Church's Pacific Islands congregations will be able to choose whether they will belong to their existing Presbytery or the new Synod, however ministers must be



A mutual ministry agreement between PCANZ and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) was signed by the Moderator, the Right Rev Ray Coster, and Moderator of the PCK, the Rev Dr Dal Ik Son during the Moderator's dinner.



Sacrament of Holy Communion at Ohope Marae. Moderator of the Pacific Islands Synod, Rev Ere Talagi Ikitoelagi, and Moderator of the General Assembly, Right Rev Ray Coster, and Moderator of Te Aka Puaho, Rev Wayne Te Kaawa.

under the same court as their congregation. Ministers whose congregations are not members of the Synod can choose to be associate members of the Synod.

In commending the proposal to Assembly, the Rev Asora Amosa used the metaphor of a strong woven mat of many strands to describe the relationship between the Pacific Islands Synod and the Church.

Moderator of Te Aka Puaho, the Rev Wayne Te Kaawa gave a moving address to Assembly in support of the proposal. He acknowledged the strong historical links between Maori and Pacific peoples, saying "you are our tuakana, our elders".

"We have been where you are right now; we have been looking for a place to stand in the Church. We stand in solidarity with you."

On the final day of Assembly, it was announced that the Rev Andrew Norton, of St Columba@Botany, had been elected Moderator Designate for 2014-2016.

Andrew, who is also chair of the Press Go Board, spoke to Assembly of the need to break down the false divide between secular and sacred work, and for ministers to lift their professional ability in leadership and management.

Overseas guests at GA12 included the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, the Rev Dr Dal Ik Son and his wife; the Presbyterian Church Myanmar General Secretary, the Rev Ring Lian Thang; and Presbyterian Church Myanmar Mission Secretary, the Rev Cin Za Lien; the Presbyterian Church Myanmar theology lecturer, Ms Lalmingsangi; a representative from the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu, Johnny Albert Tomatelu; from the Protestant Church Tahiti pastor Arthur Fua and deacon Pierre Vahine; from the Cook Island Congregational Church, the Rev Nio Jim Mariete; and the Rev Petesa Sionetuato from Ekalesia Niue Church.

A mutual ministry agreement between the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) was signed during the Moderator's dinner. The agreement replaces an earlier agreement signed between the two Churches in 1982.

As a result of the agreement, ministers from the PCK will be able to be work in our churches whilst still PCK members.

Many other decisions were made at Assembly and a full list, as well as much more detail on the decisions highlighted above, is available for download from the GA12 webpage www.presbyterian.org.nz/about-us/general-assembly/general-assembly-2012 Download from here text versions of key sermons and speeches, a take-home summary of business, and photographs taken during the event.

By Angela Singer Spanz



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CWM opens Pacific Regional Office in New Zealand

For the first time, the Council for World Mission has opened a Pacific regional office in New Zealand. It will be staffed by the Rev Fei Taule'ale'ausumai, a former minister of St Andrew's in Henderson.

Fei was commissioned as CWM Pacific Regional Secretary at the opening of the Auckland office, located at St John's and St Phillip's Presbyterian Church in Papatōetoe, in August. She was appointed to the role during the CWM General Assembly in American Samoa earlier this year.

Fei says she was interested in the role as she is a "CWM baby" – she has been part of CWM for 28 years. After attending a youth conference in 1984 and another in Holland the following year, CWM inspired her to become a minister.

"They really encouraged me in ministry and opened my heart to the possibility of becoming a minister."

Fei says she is humbled to be appointed to the role "really with the blessing of the Pacific people".

"I am passionate and excited about what the role has to offer in terms of working with the nine Pacific member churches and getting to the heart of what's important for the Church, finding out whether we are really talking to the people on the ground and exploring whether we know what people really need or are we just staying within our own four walls."

She says after serving as a minister for 10 years at St Andrew's in Henderson "I felt that I had done all that I could in that ministry context and so when this opportunity arose it was just the challenge I felt God was calling me to".

"I'm an ecumenist at heart and I believe my calling is to work with the church universal throughout the world."

While part of her role will be to oversee CWM funded projects, Fei also wants to



The Rev Fei Taule'ale'ausumai was commissioned as CWM Pacific Regional Secretary at the opening of the CWM Auckland office.

ensure that the Pacific is in the 21st century in providing opportunities for women and young people.

"It's about making sure that everyone has the potential to have that fullness of life that Jesus talks about, and to explore what are we doing that enhances or stifles that."

CWM General Secretary, the Rev Dr Collin Cowan who attended the opening of the Auckland office, says that as the Pacific Regional Secretary, Fei is responsible for supporting the nine Pacific member churches both through specific projects and in any other ways member churches can give expression to God's mission.

"CWM believes in sharing the people. So if a church needs an expert in a particular field, Fei will be responsible for finding that person from the African region or whatever region we have a person with the appropriate gifts," Collin said.

The idea to have an Auckland office came about after CWM decided to open offices in all its six regions - the Caribbean, Europe, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific - so that, as Colin says, it can be physically closer to its members. Every region will have a Regional Secretary and at least one other staff person.

CWM has made major changes to its governance structure, management structure and programme direction since Collin took over one and a half years ago.

One major change was moving its headquarters to Singapore after 35 years in London.

Collin says when CWM (formerly the London Missionary Society) first started in 1977, London was chosen as its home for the time being and the idea was always to eventually move to another location to reflect the ideological shift from a London Missionary Society to a mission organisation spread throughout six regions in the world.

"But nothing happened. In fact we want to write that story ourselves, about why it has taken so long to move," Collin says.

Some of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand projects funded in part or fully by CWM are Kids Friendly, Te Aka Puaho, the Pasifika Misionare role (the Rev Don Ikitoelagi), the Asian Mission and Ministries Coordinator role (the Rev Dr Kyoung-Gyun Han), and a reflection centre for the Pacific Island Synod.

Christine Gounder Spanz



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PIC Newton Bible Class return from poverty-stricken Tanzania richer

Eight members of PIC Newton Bible class experienced a life changing mission trip to Moshi, Tanzania, in September this year.

The idea to go to Tanzania came about a year ago when Bible Class leader John Tuitama, was searching for a place for a youth leadership retreat. He met with the principal of Hebron Christian College, Geoff Matthews, to discuss using their premises.

"While I was standing outside Geoff's office I saw photos of a trip Hebron Christian College had taken to an orphanage in Tanzania called New Life Foundation. And the Holy Spirit just came and told me to take a team there," John says.

John had previously led a mission team to China but no one from PIC Newton had ever ventured to Africa before.

The proposed journey to Africa was an expensive undertaking and the team worked hard to raise funds. John says the mission would not have been possible without the generosity of the PIC Newton family and friends.

"In the end we had more than enough and we were even able to donate US\$5,000 to New Life Foundation and buy food for 26 families."

The group took with them about 370 kilograms of gifts for the children and staff. These included school stationery, soccer uniforms, soccer balls, rugby balls, whistles, kid's t-shirts, cricket gear, baby products, and two PA systems.

John says, "We wanted to bless the New Life Foundation with what we could bring and although we were a little team we knew that little is a lot with God in it."

New Life Foundation was borne from the vision of Pastor Glorious and Josephine Shoo to help provide for the children of Moshi. It includes an orphanage, a primary school, a secondary school, and a boarding school for unwed mothers.

While in Tanzania the group stayed in Machame which is located on the bottom slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro.

John found parts of Moshi almost overwhelmingly confronting.

"Some of the poverty was too much to handle, the worst I have ever seen. I couldn't believe people lived like that. It was just unfit for human habitation."

Looking back on the trip, he says we take too much for granted here in New Zealand.

"Those people have absolutely nothing. Yet they are so rich spiritually. And age is no barrier. I saw two nursery age kids stand up and lead about 30 others kids in worship. Eyes closed and hands up, just praising God. I just couldn't believe what I saw."

Helen Amituanai, who was also part of the Bible Class group, says she too left Tanzania amazed by the strong faith shown by the children and staff at New Life Foundation.

"In their country all they have to rely on is their faith because there is nothing else. There is no television or the distractions that we have in the Western world. What a wonderful position to be in, to be able to focus on the things that truly matter. You get to spend time with God."

"The children kept telling us that we had blessed them, but they had no idea how much they had blessed us," she says.

Another team member, William Purcell, describes the trip as "amazing", "an eye opener", and a "life changer".

"It's a huge world we live in but Tanzania, and the people of New Life Foundation, have changed my life," William says.

For William the presence of God felt especially real perhaps because "in Tanzania, God is the be all and end all of people's lives".

Matalena Samuelu says the trip has left her wanting to return to Africa as it opened her eyes to value what is important and taught her not to place limits on what she can do for God.

"I find that I'm now constantly asking myself what I am doing with my life to show God's love," Matalena says.

Christine Gounder Spanz

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Taiwanese youth visitors inspired by Kids Friendly

Young people from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) were invited to visit New Zealand in September by the Asian Council of the Presbyterian Church, to help foster the growing relationship between the two Churches.

For two weeks, the six visitors aged 19 to 23 visited church schools and youth groups and met many young Christians from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Alan Lu, 22, said that for him the trip was about learning and he most enjoyed spending time with the group's hosts. He particularly appreciated the effort one host made to make food from home.

"One of them cooked us a Taiwanese congee - a slow cooked rice-based sweet or savoury porridge popular in many Asian countries. They were all just so nice to us."

He said he will be sharing a lot of his experiences with his church when he returns home, including the Kids Friendly concept.

"Kids Friendly puts a lot of effort into kids and invests in them. This concept needs to be learnt in my country because at the moment in Taiwan a lot of resources are invested only in youth and not in children."

Another of the Taiwanese group, nineteen-year-old Yuyu Chuang, was also struck by the Kids Friendly concept.

"I like the way children in [Kids Friendly] churches here are treated with respect and are involved in the church. Children in Taiwan are not encouraged to be involved in the church service."

Nineteen-year-old Aaron Jou who is majoring in education at a university in Taiwan said he was interested in learning about the education system in New Zealand.

Unlike New Zealand he said the Taiwanese education system only focuses on studying and "does not have any extracurricular activities".



Taiwanese youth visiting Oriental Parade, Wellington – leaping for joy or trying to keep warm in the wind?

Aaron said he also likes the Kiwi ethos of embracing people no matter what culture they come from.

"The people here are so friendly to each other no matter what culture and skin colour," Aaron said.

The Rev Dr Stuart Vogel, Synod Clerk for the Asian Advisory Council who organised the visit, said the young people had a lot of fun with a number of youth groups and enjoyed seeing something of New Zealand.

"They had a wonderful day of singing, talking and laughing with the girls at Turakina Maori Girls' College. At the College and at Te Kakano o Te Aroha in Lower Hutt they learnt about Maori culture and made new friends. They also opened up for us the issues which face the indigenous tribal peoples of Taiwan," Stuart said.

"The fun included fish and chips for the first time followed by an Amazing Race type of rally around Plimmerton and Paremata in Wellington."

Hosts to four of the young people, Heather and Roger Lane, from Wadestown Presbyterian Church in Wellington, said it was only their second time hosting overseas visitors and they enjoyed the experience.

Heather described the group as providing an "absolutely wonderful experience".

"They were just such a blessing to us. They were lots of fun."

The visit from the Taiwanese students is a first but it is hoped more will follow. Stuart observed that cross-cultural exchanges are

in the interest of both churches due to the challenges both churches have in common. These include the question of how to share the Gospel in a modern and changing society concerned about many issues.

"A major priority of our Church's Asian Council is to prepare emerging leaders in New Zealand and in the Asia Pacific region to face these issues. The Taiwanese youth visit is the first project towards achieving this," Stuart said.

The Asian Council wants to bring young people and emerging leaders of churches in the region together for friendship, development and leadership in mission and ministry training programmes. "We hope a group from our Church can visit Taiwan next year," Stuart said.

Stuart would also like to include exchanges with other churches in Asia, including the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea. He said it is important to forge vital and strong relationships "because we have large Korean and Taiwanese communities resident here in New Zealand".

And he would like to see our congregations get involved in exchanges too.

"Our need is for our Church - all its presbyteries, congregations and members - to embrace this vision and strategy. If your congregation or presbytery is asked to take part in such programmes please grab the chance. You won't be disappointed."

Christine Gounder [Spanz](#)

Congregation lights up lives on Rabi Island

Four hundred lucky families on the island of Rabi, in northern Fiji, have had their lives lit up thanks to the generosity of the Mahurangi Presbyterian Church youth group.

The island does not have any electricity so the group helped raise money to buy solar lights for island families.

There are about 1000 homes on Rabi, located in four villages. Each village has a large generator that only runs for two to three hours each day. Groups in the village take turns paying for the generator's fuel that costs twice as much as on the Fiji's central islands.

Bruce Eirena, assistant pastor at Mahurangi Presbyterian Church in Warkworth, says he first learnt about the plight of the people of Rabi who are known as Banabans, through his friendship with a local Banaban family.

"My family has been friends with Henry Teitirake and his family for a few years now. Henry told us how, because of a lack of electricity on the island, a majority of people put kerosene in a tin-can along with a rag as a make-shift form of lighting for the evening and for children to study by."

Hearing about this unsafe situation Bruce decided to start a project to send a solar light to every home on Rabi.

The church's youth group fundraised and managed to collect \$8000. Apart from the costs of the lights they also had to fundraise for their travel to Fiji and to Rabi.

The 11 day trip would have cost \$2000 each. But Bruce says that after contributions from the church and fundraising, each person only had to come up with half this amount themselves.

They also kept their costs down by being hosted by churches for most of the trip.

"We used the money we saved on food and to buy three sound systems for the Banaban Methodist Church in Suva, and two for the Methodist Church in Rabi," Bruce says.

The group was also able to donate a range of other useful items to the island including



Locals from Rabi Island, near Fiji, welcome the arrival of the Mahurangi Presbyterian Church youth group.

70 pairs of reading glasses, 20 rugby balls, high quality D-Cell rechargeable batteries and a fast charger, an inverter and 12V battery for the church to charge batteries as well as stationery for the schools and kindergartens.

Bruce says the gifts will be a huge practical help to the locals.

"Spear-diving for fish at night is an important source of food. Previously people on the island used up to four sets of torch batteries every evening. With the rechargeable batteries they will only need one set of batteries for the entire night."

The group had a full schedule in Fiji, visiting an orphanage in Suva, using puppets to perform Bible stories, leading church services, and taking devotions with the Banaban people every day.

The church at Tabwewa holds about 600 people and about 400 attended the Sunday morning service.

Bruce says traditionally the Methodist churches in Fiji and Rabi don't permit music in their services. As a result, he

believes, they are facing difficulty in connecting with young people.

"They were keen for us to include music so they could observe our style of church. The exchange of faith traditions was really quite extraordinary and we all learnt a lot from each other."

The solar lights the group took with them have been distributed through the one high school on the island to ensure high school students were the first to receive them.

Bruce says the trip was a big undertaking, in preparation and resources "but was absolutely one hundred percent worthwhile".

"We saw God moving in the hearts and minds of our group and in those on the island, as well as in the Banaban communities in Lautoka and Suva."

The Mahurangi Presbyterian Church youth group plans to help the people of Rabi Island again and hopes this trip is the beginning of a long relationship between the two communities.

Christine Gounder [Spanz](#)



Land Grabs Prompt Christmas Appeal Focus

The shock of discovering that land the eight times the area of New Zealand has been stolen in the last decade has prompted the focus of this year's Christian World Service (CWS) Christmas Appeal entitled "My Place - To Till and Keep".

"My Place" underscores the significance of land ownership, and the idea of a place "to till and keep" draws on Genesis 2:15.

CWS had been aware that land grabs are a reality and an issue for partner groups in post-tsunami India where CWS has helped support legal appeals against land theft.

However it was only when researching potential focuses for this year's Christmas Appeal that the shocking scale and severity of land grabbing became fully apparent. The scale and urgency of the problem that CWS's research revealed has led the agency to embrace it as this year's theme.

The Christmas Appeal is CWS's largest fundraiser of the year. Each year it supplies churches and supporters with focussed resources for study, reflection and worship during Advent and Christmas.

"We originally had other ideas for the theme but what we discovered simply swept them aside," says CWS national director, Pauline McKay.

The picture of land grabs that emerged is both disturbing and morally challenging.

"We were shocked to find so much land, often owned in common, had been sold or taken into private ownership in recent years," Pauline says.

This year's Christmas Appeal contains a specific theological reflection on the subject from Professor Andrew Bradstock, Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago.

He notes the reflections of the 17th Century English writer Gerrard Winstanley, who wrote that the Creator "made the earth to be a common treasury". Winstanley believed Genesis contains no suggestion



CWS partner in the Philippines, Developers, is able to build economic self-sufficiency because of secure land tenure and ownership. Land grabs remove this option from small scale farmers and businesspeople

that God intended anyone to parcel up large quantities of land for themselves while others begged for its fruits. Land was given for all to live from. God entrusted it to humanity to "till and keep" (Genesis 2.15), not to do with as they please, Professor Bradstock insists.

But land has become a commodity along with crops. And the corporates and nations grabbing land for their own benefit inevitably want the best available in the least developed areas to generate reliable commodities in the futures market - increasingly food.

As a result food prices have been increasingly volatile. In 2007, for instance, wheat prices increased 77 percent and the following year rice prices rose an extraordinary 141 percent.

Privatised land, often previously owned in common, is also frequently used for monoculture aimed at producing environmentally damaging biofuels.

The 2012 International Land Coalition report shows that globally 40 percent of

grabbed land is used for biofuels. This figure rises to 60 percent in Africa.

Behind these statistics lie personal and often tragic human stories, like the Ugandan farmer who awoke one day to the sound of bulldozers crushing his crops. His ancestral lands had been "sold" without his consent.

Stories like this led the United Nations in May this year to formally ask governments to respect indigenous people's rights to their land. Along with this request went a plea to businesses and multinationals to respect human rights wherever they operate.

CWS's Christmas Appeal isn't just about the bad news. It shines a light on both problems and possible solutions.

Some of the partner stories in the Appeal resources demonstrate the potential that partnership holds for finding ways to help people retain and make the most of their land.

You can find out more about the CWS Christmas Appeal and how to support it online at christmasappeal.org.nz



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