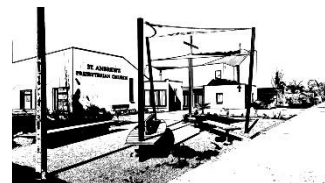


St Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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20th June 2023

To the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

On behalf of St Andrews Church, Hastings, I am writing to thank the numerous churches, schools and individuals of PCANZ for the incredible generosity you have demonstrated. Church Hastings. After the devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle in early February, the Right Reverend Hamish Galloway, sent out a letter to Presbyterians around the country suggesting that our St Andrews genLend initiative could be one way to support Hawkes Bay.

With the outpouring of aroha and donations, we as a church felt so grateful and so encouraged to be part of PCANZ family. Again, thank you.

I am writing to let you know how we have used, and how we plan to use what you, as well as others around Aotearoa (and in Australia and the USA) have generously given. It is a responsibility that we are taking incredibly seriously. Below you will read about both our initial response to the cyclone as well as our plans for a new community ministry.

Initial Response

genLend

The genLend initiative that St Andrews, Hastings rolled out just a few days after the cyclone hit went incredibly well. We secured around 80 units of equipment from around the North Island and lent them out to so many in need whether it be generators, water blasters, bobcats, diggers, a fuel cell, a caravan and even a ute.

We partnered with the Stortford Lodge Rotary in Hastings who looked after much of the logistics. This included a retired farmer, a member of that club, spending many weeks cruising around in a genLend bobcat moving silt wherever he was needed. This activity was funded by the numerous donations that genLend received.

In the months since the cyclone happened, we have come across numerous people who were lent a genLend generator in those early post-flood days, who have talked about what a difference it made to their lives during an incredibly tough time. One generator was taken across the Mangaone River on a dingy to provide electricity for someone who was medically dependent. Another went to whanau who had just had a baby, and having the generator meant they could return home.

As the volunteers working for genLend connected with those who were cyclone affected there were so many opportunities to simply be there and listen. The husband of one of our church members who isn't interested in church was able to help out in Pakowhai with his tractor and bucket. Not seeing the homeowner while he was there, he made a point of going back and was so struck by the need of that family to simply share their story and have him listen.

We have now wound down genLend as we enter a new phase of the recovery.

\$300 Vouchers

In those early post-cyclone days, there were so many displaced people, who had lost everything. We purchased \$300 vouchers from both Briscoes and the Warehouse and gave these out to people throughout the community to buy what they needed.

Cyclone Impacted Schools

We funded five cyclone-impacted schools to enable them to run resilience programmes for the many students in their schools who were struggling.

A Community Garden

We have also contributed to a new community garden that is being developed in Waiohiki. This was a small community of each establishing their own vegetable garden they have decided to band together to create a garden for their community. As well as providing some seed funding for this we are keen to help out and build relationships with them as we work alongside one another.

[A New Community Ministry](#)

Bridging Hawkes Bay

Four months on, what is becoming very apparent is the trauma and mental health issues that whanau are experiencing. Already there have been several suicides that are directly connected to the cyclone. While 80% of Hawkes Bay is fine and driving around Hastings and Napier you won't see much that is different but going out into the hinterland is confronting. Some people are living in tents and others in containers on their land, unable to afford rent on top of their mortgage.

Just last week I heard of two people who, while they weren't flooded, live amid communities that were and are finding it hard to even leave their houses and see all the ruin around them.

In response to this, we are establishing a new community ministry where we will employ a community ministry leader who will connect with cyclone-affected people to offer support and care and who will also train and equip volunteers to do the same. There are many who are feeling forgotten, and this is a way of connecting and showing Christ's love in a tangible way. We want people to know that they are loved and treasured.

We are calling this new initiative Bridging Hawkes Bay. We learned in the days and weeks after the cyclone how important bridges are physically. Numerous bridges were destroyed or damaged leaving people in rural communities isolated and fending for themselves. While some Bailey bridges have been built to reconnect our communities physically these are temporary and have limitations.

The name 'Bridging Hawkes Bay' was inspired by Joy Cowley's beautiful poem 'The Bridge' describing how we are called to be a bridge to others in their time of need.¹

*There are times in life when we are called to be bridges,
not a great monument spanning a distance
and carrying loads of heavy traffic*

¹ Joy Cowley, Aotearoa Psalms: Prayers of a New People, (Catholic Supplies, New Zealand, 1989), 20.

but a simple bridge to help one person from here to there over some difficulty such as pain, fear, grief, loneliness, a bridge which opens the way for ongoing journey.

This initiative is very much Holy Spirit led. Bridging Hawkes Bay emerged after we connected with two women from a local Baptist church who along with others had been taking groceries (from a local food share organisation) out to flood-affected communities. They discovered early that offering groceries as koha quickly broke the ice and enabled them to ask whanau how they were doing. It struck us as an effective model to enable us to connect with and care for our hurting community.

Bridging Hawkes Bay will be recruiting volunteers from churches throughout Hawkes Bay – this is an ecumenical response. Volunteers will be empowered, supported and trained in psychosocial first aid, active listening, emotional wellbeing, as well as the theology of chaplaincy and resources that are available for cyclone-affected whanau.

We are conscious that the impact of the cyclone will be ongoing for at least five years and we see Bridging Hawkes Bay as a way that we can equip and support people of faith to be missionaries within our own province.

God longs for the flourishing of all people and we are deeply shaped by the words from John 13:35: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

How Can You Help Bridging Hawkes Bay?

If you are wondering – is there anything I could do to help, there are two things we would be incredibly grateful for.

- Firstly, your prayer for this new initiative
- Secondly, we are looking for a Community Ministry Leader to run Bridging Hawkes Bay. If this interests you or might interest someone you know, please email jill@standrewshastings.org.nz

Once again, I thank you for your incredible generosity.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Jill McDonald