



Congregational to Presbyterian

Narrative of 50 years (1969 - 2019)

This reflection is provided by Church Moderator, the Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio. It shares some of the background to the General Assembly 1969 decision to accept around 7,000 Congregational Union ministers and members into fellowship within the Presbyterian Church.

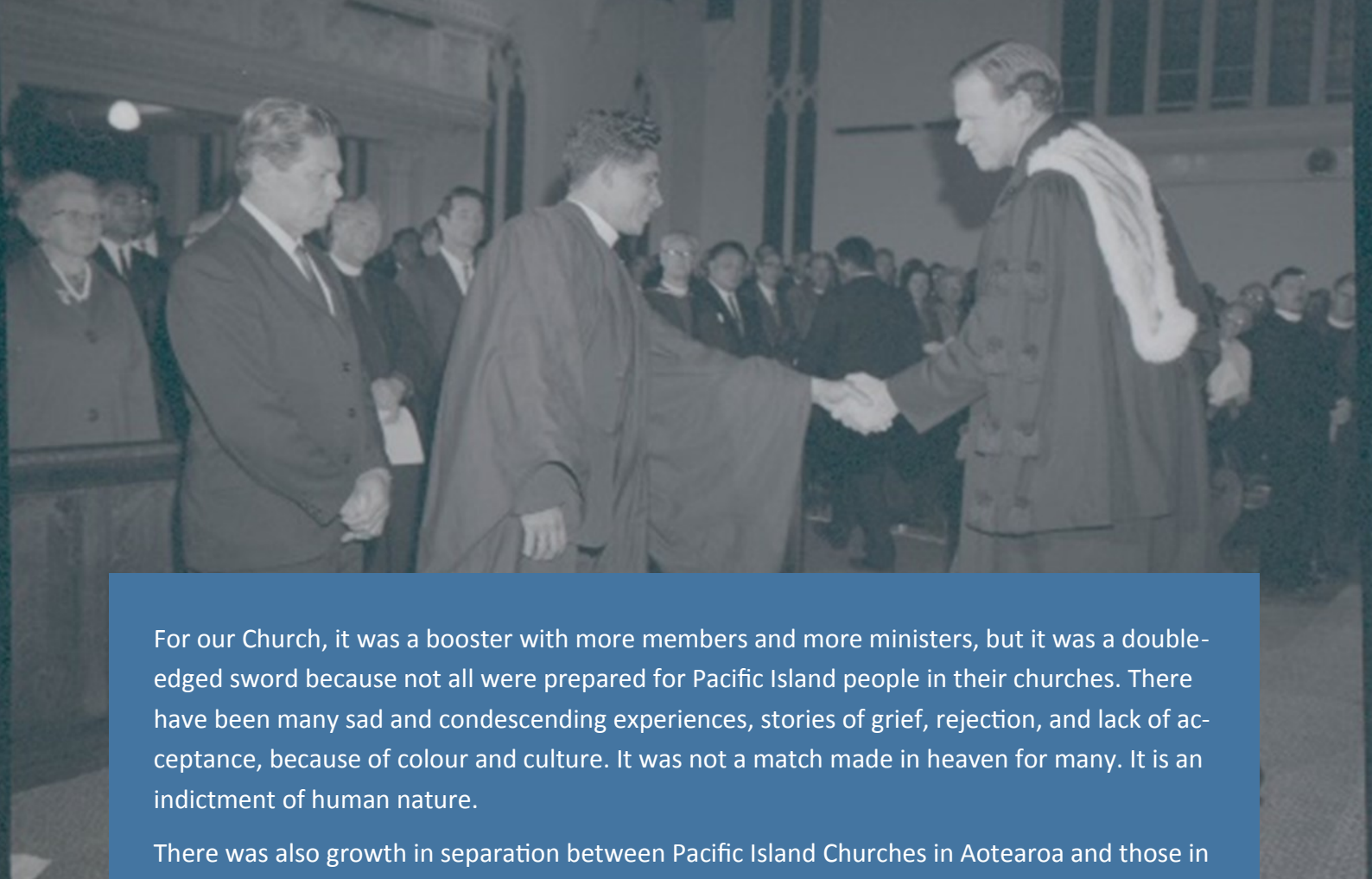
During the mid-1960s, church unity and the ecumenical movement worldwide were paramount. There were conversations between denominations globally and nationally. There was a sense of the moving of the Holy Spirit.

In the late 1960s, there was a strong sense of change for many in the Congregational Union (CUNZ) family. The view, idea and plan was to move to the Presbyterian (PCANZ) family, where there seemed to be a wider range of opportunities for parishes, ministers and individuals.

In 1969 at our Church's General Assembly in Dunedin, the move took place. There were 28 ministers and 26 parishes received into the Presbyterian Church, which at that time, encompassed most of the Pacific Islanders in New Zealand. It is said that 6,900 people moved. They changed from CUNZ to the PCANZ.

This was a historical movement in the landscape of the church life of Christians in New Zealand. It was like a Pentecostal moment, "thousands were added to their numbers". It was a phenomenal moment in New Zealand Church history.

While most Congregational Union members joined the Presbyterian Church, some did not. Consequently, the aftermath of this event left lasting grief for the Congregational Union family. They were shattered, depleted, void and carried a sense of loss all these years. Slowly and surely, they have rebuilt and are moving forward.



For our Church, it was a booster with more members and more ministers, but it was a double-edged sword because not all were prepared for Pacific Island people in their churches. There have been many sad and condescending experiences, stories of grief, rejection, and lack of acceptance, because of colour and culture. It was not a match made in heaven for many. It is an indictment of human nature.

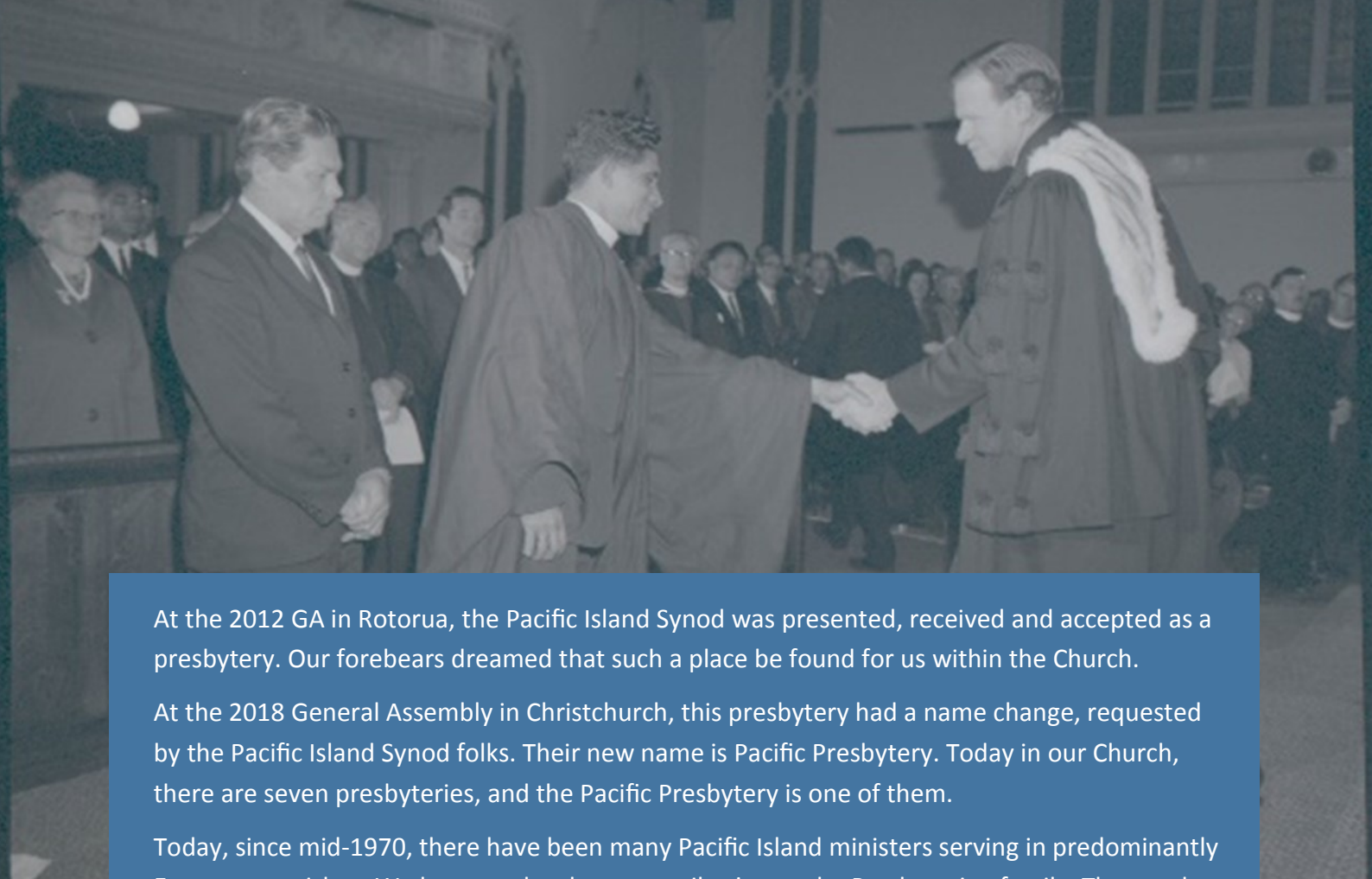
There was also growth in separation between Pacific Island Churches in Aotearoa and those in the islands. Their desire to be congregational in church ethos and polity caused division with their families in New Zealand. The division has widened in all cases. Today we are talking with our Pacific neighbours about the partnership and creating Memorandums of Understanding.

In 1997 the Council for World Mission (CWM) was formed. This is the new name of a movement formerly known as the London Missionary Society (LMS). This is a missionary movement out of London that evangelised most of the Pacific, parts of Asia, parts of Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of Europe.

The Congregation Church is a manifestation of LMS. And the move of people from CUNZ to our Church 50 years ago, made the Presbyterian Church eligible to be a member of CWM. Today CWM has 32 member denominations across six regions. We are in the Pacific Region of CWM.

At the General Assembly 1969, the Church's Moderator was the Rt Reverend Owen Baragwanath. The chairperson of the Congregation Union was the Rev Leuatea Iusitini Sio. So much has taken place over the 50 years. Today there are four ministers still alive from the original 28 received into the Presbyterian Church. Pasifika ministers are integral members of our church communities and are involved in all courts of our Church.

Today, many former Congregational sons and daughters – now Presbyterians – have ministered, lead and been involved in poignant roles in our Church. We have settled well into our new home. We have served faithfully. We have committed our all to our beloved Presbyterian Church.



At the 2012 GA in Rotorua, the Pacific Island Synod was presented, received and accepted as a presbytery. Our forebears dreamed that such a place be found for us within the Church.

At the 2018 General Assembly in Christchurch, this presbytery had a name change, requested by the Pacific Island Synod folks. Their new name is Pacific Presbytery. Today in our Church, there are seven presbyteries, and the Pacific Presbytery is one of them.

Today, since mid-1970, there have been many Pacific Island ministers serving in predominantly European parishes. We have made a huge contribution to the Presbyterian family. The words of the late Rev Leuatea Sio: "go and serve in Palagi parishes if you are called there. Learn how the Presbyterian Church works and functions. Give your all for the people God sends you to. And when your people call you. Be available, be willing to come and lead your people."

Over the years, there have been many events and activities that transcended on our lives through both the CUNZ and the Presbyterian Church: bible class, Boys and Girls Brigade, Sunday schools, youth groups, camps, scripture examinations, choir competitions, theological training and so much more.

This year marks 50 years since the decision by GA 1969 in Dunedin. So, on the corresponding Sunday, 3 November 2019, we aim to remember this moment in a commemoration service.

It is hoped that churches in our Presbyterian family can remember this event in their Sunday 3 November, worship services. Please keep both CUNZ and PCANZ in your prayers. In the afternoon, at 4 pm at the Newton Pacific Island Presbyterian Church in Auckland, there will be a combined commemoration service. Rev Tale Hakeagaiki of the Congregational Union, and myself on behalf of our Church, will lead.

Incredibly, Sunday 3 November is CWM Sunday on the Christian calendar.

Stories and events will be shared in the service, and afterwards we will gather in the hall for refreshment and fellowship. All are invited and welcomed. Bring yourself, share a story. Bring a plate of food to share.

This is an event that transformed and transported many lives into new experiences with God, others and Jesus Christ. May the Spirit continue to move in our lifetime for the glory and praise of God, and for the sacred plans of God to be witnessed manifest, and transcend upon us.