




METAPHORS FOR

# WHANAU NGA TANGA

An invitation to explore how  
God's call to whanaungatanga  
can shape the way we meet  
together for business and  
strategy.





# WHANAU NGA TANGA

God calls us to whanaungatanga.  
Whanaungatanga is about  
bringing people together.

We are invited to be formed and  
led forward as whanau (family):  
building strong relationships  
through sharing life together and  
working alongside one another.  
We do this by playing, praying,  
working, resting, eating and  
belonging - together.

This discussion guide is an  
invitation for us all to explore how  
God's call to whanaungatanga can  
shape the way we meet together  
for business and strategy.

Our hope is that the richness of  
these metaphors will spark our  
imaginations and serve as a  
springboard (another metaphor!)  
for us to consider how God is  
calling us to lead and serve within  
the Presbyterian Church of  
Aotearoa New Zealand.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This discussion guide is offered to any and all councils and committees of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is designed to be used during the devotional time at the start of a meeting. You may choose to ask the members of your team to pre-read a particular metaphor and consider their responses to the reflection questions ahead of the meeting.

You are welcome to adapt this guide to suit your context

## 01 PAUSE

## 02 PRAY

## 03 READ

## 04 DISCUSS

- What word or phrase from the metaphor catches your attention?
- What stories or sayings from the Bible come to mind?
- What can we see in this metaphor about how Jesus guides us to love like he does?
- How is God inviting us to respond? What might God be calling us to do or become?



# A WORD ON METAPHOR

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A metaphor is a way of describing one thing as if it were another, suggesting a strong image to make connections in our minds.

A metaphor helps explain complex ideas or emotions by linking them to something familiar. Instead of stating facts, a metaphor invites interpretation and adds depth to language by blending the literal with the imaginative.

The metaphors used in this guide are not authoritative like Scripture, and are offered as one way to open up creative thought and discussion together.



# GOLF

## A Metaphor for Strategy

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Anne's husband, Greg, keeps playing golf even though his eyesight is failing him. He is not allowed to drive anymore. But he can still swing a golf club and caddy his own kit around the course.

Greg can do this because he's been playing golf for fifty odd years now, because his friends give him a lift in their car, and because he returns to the course he knows well. He can see the Fairway in his mind and knows where to go even though his vision is blurry and darkening.

Greg is an amateur and he's very happy with that. Most of us are amateurs.

The goal of golf is to hit the ball from tee to hole in as few shots as possible. A lot of the time, the weekday hacker hits the ball into the rough - that place where the grass is long and and the trees stand guard.

One of the fundamental rules of golf is to play the ball where it lies. We can't just pick it up and place it where we want to. We amateurs are not as skilled as the pros. To hit a miracle shot from the rough is beyond us. Those times, hitting it to a clearing, even if it is behind the ball's current line, might be the best way forward because we can have a clear view of where we are going.

Are we in the rough on an unfamiliar course? Heads down, searching around for something precious that has been lost.

The ancient stories of the Hebrew people remind us that God is in the rough. They called it the Wilderness. This might not be what

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# GOLF

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we'd hoped for, but this is where we are. The only way out of the Wilderness is through faithfulness and the passing of time.

Look up. Look around. Let's make our way back to the Fairway. Return to that which is familiar and true. From there we can gain a sense of a way forward.

Take stock. Take a shot. But don't hope for the elusive 'master stroke'. Let's choose our tools wisely and pitch a simple shot back to the centre, to our centre.

*Titiro whakamuri, kōkiri whakamua.  
Look back, to move forward.*

## TE WAKA A Metaphor for Partnership

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John Laughton<sup>1</sup> came to Tamiana Thrupp<sup>2</sup> in a dream. “Haramai ka haere tāua ki Maungapōhatu. Come, let us go to Maungapōhatu,” the old man called. In an instant, the two stood on the whenua (land) gifted to John Laughton by Tūtakangahau’s daughter, Huhana. Maungapōhatu is nestled in the Urewera bush, resting at the foot of the mountain from which the settlement receives its name. Maungapōhatu is remote, mystical and sacred.

John Laughton (1891-1965) first set foot in the Urewera back-country in 1918. Known as ‘Hoani’, the Scottish born Home Missionary and Minister earned the respect and affection of Maori. He worked closely with Rua Kēnana Hepetipa (c. 1868-1937) - a prophet who founded an alternative religious community deep in the Urewera. Together they worked for unity and peace based on the shared belief that one God could be encountered in many ways.

“Kai te tanuku te waka o te Hinota Maori<sup>3</sup>. The waka of Te Aka Puaho is tipping,” Hoani said to Tamiana in a dream. A waka tips over when the water is rough, when those paddling no longer move with unity and purpose, when the singing that guides their strokes stops. To right the waka, first everyone must let go of control and listen to all the voices - even the small ones.

Tamiana’s mokopuna, Jabez (5) and Killeen (3), had each seen a vision. “Young men will see visions, old men will dream dreams”<sup>4</sup> another prophet once said. Both boys had seen a building at the bottom of Lake Rotomā and the people were in peril.

When John Laughton said the waka was upside down and way off course Tamiana paid attention because of what these young boys

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# TE WAKA

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had spoken about. These visions and dreams are a part of God's leading to be restored, transformed and renewed. "But," Tamiana says, "we can only achieve this by working together as one." This is a legacy we have received from Hoani and Rua, who trusted and delighted in the contributions of others.

***He waka eke noa.  
We are all in this together.***

<sup>1</sup> <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/414/laughton-john-george>

<sup>2</sup> Moderator of Te Aka Puahou as at 2025

<sup>3</sup> The Maori Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, then named Te Aka Puaho, now named Te Aka Puahou.

<sup>4</sup> Joel 2:28

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# TE AWA      A Metaphor for Grievances

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There's an old 90's rock band who wrote the song *Water Under the Bridge* (not to be confused with a different 90's rock band who wrote a song with a similar name).

*I do not love you the way I did when we met.  
There are secrets and arguments I haven't finished yet.  
But it's only that grace has outlived our regret,  
we're still here.  
Maybe we can stay,  
'til the last drop of water flows under the bridge.*

*There are times meant for breaking and words to ignore.  
A bent to our souls when our skin is at war.  
And if leaving were freedom,  
well, we'd both walk right out of that door.  
Maybe we can stay,  
'til the last drop of water flows under the bridge<sup>1</sup>.*

The phrase water under the bridge is a metaphor in itself, referring to something difficult that has happened in the past which cannot be changed now so there's no need to dwell on it any further.

But what are we to do when there are painful and unchangeable events in our past yet no sign of a bridge? Should we build one? The engineers among us may ask further questions about the purpose and construction type, about the terrain and access, about the materials and the load bearing capacity.

Maybe we can stay and dwell on our surroundings a little further?

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# TE AWA

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The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council say ‘crossing a river is a serious undertaking. You need skill and sound judgement to cross successfully.’<sup>2</sup> It’s important to assess the pace and depth of the river, the clarity of the water, and the presence of debris and other hazardous signs. If you are experienced and deem the river safe, then choose an appropriate point to cross using the Mutual Support Method.

Assemble your party. Place strong, experienced and resilient people at either end. Link your arms along each other’s backs and hold tight. Know your entry and exit point. Move as a single unit. Do not break formation until you are safely on the other side. Dry off, have a drink and something to eat.

When there is grief over the actions of another and once the surging waters have subsided, maybe we can stay. Our God is our guide. Our God has soothed chaotic waters more than once. Our God moves, again and again, to cross the divide and create a pathway for the people to travel together.

*He manga wai koia kia kore e whitikia?  
Is a river never to be crossed?*

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<sup>1</sup> Water Under the Bridge by Jars of Clay

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mountainsafety.org.nz/learn/skills/river-safety>



# GORSE

## A Metaphor for Succession

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Gorse is an exotic weed and an incubator for native seeds. First introduced by our nation's pioneering European ancestors, gorse flourished in the full sun and rapidly became rampant. What began as a boundary marker and windbreak is now a costly weed to control.

But, there are signs of hope.

In 1987, Dr Hugh Wilson (a botanist and the son of a Presbyterian minister) began a small ecological restoration project on 109 hectares of gorse infested, marginal hill country on Banks Peninsula. Nearly 40 years later, the Hinewai Reserve has become 1250 hectares of flourishing native bush which stops just short of the sea.

This is accomplished through the work of Dr Wilson and the Maurice White Native Forest Trust. Dr Wilson and those he worked with were wise, though unconventional - 'fools and dreamers' some said. Rather than battling against the gorse - burning or bulldozing it - they left it well alone. "It is an ecologically well-known fact that gorse is a pioneer succession plant."<sup>1</sup>

You see, the dense gorse gives self-sown native seeds a place to germinate and grow. The little ones are sheltered from harsh sun and strong winds and protected from possums and other pests. As they grow they shade the gorse, slow its growth and eventually replace it.

Something is dying. Something is rising.

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# GORSE

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What if we more intentionally incubated and nurtured indigenous forms of the life of faith?

What if our pioneering work was the stuff of fools and dreamers?

What if we remembered the contribution of our forebears - imported boundary markers, ways of being together - but relinquished the rules and ways of the past that no longer serve as they were originally intended?

*Poipoia te kākano, kia puāwai  
Nurture the seed and it will bloom.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2018703481/gorse-for-the-trees-how-one-man-brought-back-a-forest>

# WHETŪ

## A Metaphor for Direction

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Luke is a surveyor. When his family go on holiday they take photos of benchmark pins used for geodetic control points.<sup>1</sup> The pins are crafted from corrosion-resistant stainless steel and are engineered to stay anchored in one place for the longest time. To the novice, they are little light reflecting domes stuck in concrete or rock. To the surveyor, they are another story altogether.

Our modern navigation systems are held together by a highly accurate reference network of geodetic control points.

I'm sorry, you've lost me.

Quite the contrary.

Benchmark pins are placed very precisely, allowing us to determine the lay of the land and helping us know where we are, exactly. This is one way we can set the direction for our next journey or engineering project. In the past, surveyors used the stars that can be seen during the day along with a theodolite (a precision optical instrument) for orientation.

For the longest time, our ancestors looked to the little light reflecting orbs in the night sky. The stars were both a guide to navigate a way across the ocean and a reminder to begin preparing for the next season's crop in the place where our feet are planted. The stars move us and ground us.

Our ancestors gave the stars names and stories as a way of remembering what has been done and what is yet to be done. Our Scriptures remind us that God placed the stars very precisely and

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# WHETŪ

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calls them each by name.<sup>2</sup> God told Abraham that his children would be like stars - uncountable and beautiful. The ancient Hebrews saw God's story of redemption and grace in the night sky. God set a star in the sky when Jesus was born. To those who surveyed the sky, this is another story altogether.

So where to from here?

*Me mātau ki te whetū,  
i mua kōkiri o te haere  
Before you set forth on a journey,  
be sure you know the stars.*

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<sup>1</sup> e/survey-benchmark-pins <https://www.surveymarks.co.nz/product-pag>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 147:4

# FIBRE      A Metaphor for Reconciliation

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My daughter has a yellow quilt on her bed with splashes of blue, green, grey and white. We commissioned our friend, Kerry, to make it. Yellow is my husband's favourite colour. The other colours come from his mum, Violet.

Violet died a few months before her last grandbabies were born - two girls ten weeks apart. She loved babies. She'd had six of her own. Even when her mind and her mobility were fading, Violet would get down on the floor and gaze at the babies wriggling around on the play mat. She remembered how to love a little one. She would have done the same for these two little girls.

A handful of Violet's clothes were cut into the shape of petals and stitched onto the yellow quilt. First, they were fused together with interfacing - a light but strong fabric that gives strength and structure.

Last night, as I tucked my almost five year old into bed, I told her about how the petals on her quilt came from her Nana Vi. Eyes wide, she said, "Nana Vi remembered me? She remembered me." In a way, yes. "She is in my heart." In a way, yes.

The fibres remember. There is a tendency in some fabrics to retain their wrinkles, creases and quirks long after they have been washed, constructed and set in place with starch and steam.

Our bodies are made of fibres. The author of Psalm 139 says so poetically what we know to be scientifically true - we were knit together in our mothers' wombs. Our muscles remember trauma

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# FIBRE

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and growth. Our bones show the signs of old fractures long after they have been fused together again. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and re-made.

Sometimes we are torn apart. Those we love are gone and there is a gaping hole. The fabric of our lives is stretched out of shape, strained, stained, worn through.

We are people of the cloth. This is an old phrase used to describe those who serve God's church. The fibres remember. The fibres can be remembered. Worked and woven back together. This is the work of our God who remembers us.

*Whiria te tāngata*  
*Weave the people together*

Te Kāhui Whanaungatanga

# NOTES

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