

Report from CWM Gender Justice Workshop (Pacific)

Nadi, Fiji | 1-5 June 2015

On 1 – 5 June 2015 the Council for World Mission held a “Gender Justice” Workshop (Pacific) for its Pacific member churches in Nadi, Fiji. I attended with Rev Michelle Shin and Rev Carol Grant. It was pleasing to hear gender officer roles appointed in Papua New Guinea, there was a huge growth of women pastors in Kiribati. We heard one of the big churches in Samoa pass in their gathering last month that “they do not support the ordination of women into ministry” and a Tongan newspaper headline “Opposition but Tonga Government firm on CEDAW report” (Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women). We had lengthy discussions on Christianity v culture, as Pacific Islanders we have our own cultures, language, customs and traditions. Culture has helped women but culture has also hindered the advancement of women.

Purpose

Some 40 people from CWM’s Pacific member churches, including local church leaders, women’s community representatives and youth participated. A re-interpretation of the biblical text on gender and cultures, violence and women ordination formed the basis of discussions in this workshop. The workshop is contextual to the Pacific region and churches are challenged to say “NO” to violence against women. The meeting also explored equality and gender balance both in the local church and society. The following being a joint statement for collective actions and affirmations we have agreed upon as a community of God’s people in the Pacific region.

A Call to Action:

Scripture basis:

We affirm that all male and female are in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:27-28).

We spent time listening to the scriptures in devotions and through methods of bible study.

We struggled with the connection between the influence of culture and the liberating power of the gospel, and accepted that they both had influence on each other.

We were challenged with methods of interpretation that invited a new look at familiar texts. Between the influence of cultural beliefs and the challenges of new interpretation we heard the struggle to know how to speak and to give voice to hurt and to be included.

We recognized that there were real struggles between what has always been taught and believed and the challenges of the new methods of interpretation.

We celebrated the stories of women’s leadership and ordination affirming that incremental gradual changes were being made in pockets.

We heard data that shocked us about the extent of physical and sexual violence within families and communities in the Pacific. In light of this we agreed among ourselves that all forms of violence is evil and chose to name domestic violence as a sin.

It was acknowledged that if conversations on gender justice are to progress the issue of theological formation at all levels would require review.

Attitudinal changes

It was acknowledged that efforts at networking between Pacific churches on the issues of gender justice using the PCC and other ecumenical bodies.

Churches committing to building awareness at all levels to the extent of the prevalence of domestic violence.

Commitment to becoming part of the process of change

That CWM member churches in the region would get to the place where the gift and talents of women are affirmed in and through the office of ordination.

Developing models of oceanic interpretation

Lafulafu Vanila Ekenasio

National Convenor

Presbyterian Women