

Spanz

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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After the Christchurch terror attacks

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A Christian perspective on free speech vs hate speech

Following the Christchurch shootings, and public reflection on how “hate speech” may have contributed to them, much of the public discourse clustered initially around the issue of freedom of expression within the public space – our right to free speech.

Most of the concepts guiding that discourse came from the principles of democracy. The discourse didn't seem, to me, to be all that productive. Wondering whether anything from the Christian tradition might provide a way forward, I found myself reflecting on four Bible stories about speech. (There are, of course, many others.)

The first human being is taught to speak

Early in the Biblical narrative, God, having created a human being, becomes concerned that the human being is alone. God says: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

God creates all manner of living creatures, then sits with the human being, encouraging “him” to name them. The naming of things – the first using of words to describe what is seen – is all part of making the human being less alone.

The original gift of language, then, is for the building of community. To use language in any way that breaks community fails to use language in its natural, purposeful way.

If speech is for “seeking partnership”, and hate is about “denial of communion”, then “hate speech” becomes an oxymoron. In this story, it's not about “right to speech”; it's about what speech is for. Speech is a gift, given in love, against the great loneliness. The main dynamic is nurture and grace.

The ambitious find themselves unable to communicate

My second speech story is about Babel. The development of different languages, and the source of miscommunication (to the point of frustration of purpose), is presented as God's response to humanity's naked ambition. If humanity is going to be arrogantly ambitious, then God will mess up humanity's ability to communicate.

The story suggests that whenever language fails to do what it should do, there is a link, somehow, to inappropriate human ambition. Again, from a secular, democratic standpoint, one might argue that each human being has a right to speak, but when ambition fuels the speaking, the speech just won't work.

What is speech for? It is for communion. “Ambitious communion” is as much an oxymoron as “hate speech”.

The withdrawal of speech

The one occasion where Jesus declined to speak was when he was faced by Herod Antipas. Infamously corrupt, irrelevant and decadent, Herod received no words from Jesus. Is there a sense here of speech (given for communion) being rather too valuable a gift to be extended to someone who is not open to communion?

Speech is presented as a sacred gift, but only between those who listen. This high regard for the dignity of speech perhaps provides caution to those who, within their assumed right to speak freely, use speech casually or refuse also to listen.

The compulsion of speech

In Acts 4, Peter and John, having been arrested for speech crimes the day before, were called to give account before the Council in Jerusalem. Peter, said to having been prompted by the Spirit, says



Rev Dr Matthew Jack

what he needs to say. He speaks truth to power, and on this occasion the truth sets him free – the council begrudgingly releases him.

This has become one of the paradigms for Christian boldness in speech; bold speech is argued to be the work of the Spirit. The context of the speaking is important though. Peter speaks not into some vague space of un-answerability. He speaks into a space of responsibility and consequence. As he speaks, he is answerable to those who listen and can end his speaking forever. This story questions any suggestion that you can say whatever you want, and walk away.

There are times for free speaking.

Those times come not without cost. There are dismissive, un-listening times when speech is better withheld – to maintain the dignity of the gift. There are times when our speech is subverted by our ambition. Most importantly, there is a noble original purpose for which speech was given.

Arohanui.

– Rev Dr Matthew Jack is minister of Knox Presbyterian Church, Christchurch.

Spanz

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Spanz is published by the
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa
New Zealand,
PO Box 9049, Wellington, New Zealand

Editor

Angela Singer
angela@presbyterian.org.nz
Ph 04 381-8284

Advertising

Jose Reader
spanzadvertising@presbyterian.org.nz

Subscriptions

Katrina Graham
katrina@presbyterian.org.nz
Ph 04 381-8283

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MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

The Right Rev Fakaofu Kaio contributes a regular column to Spanz.

Through the year

"Great is thy faithfulness O God, you were eternally God and will be God forever."



Psalms 90: 2 captures my heart's gratitude. This year has been an incredible experience for my wife Ruth and I. It is a privilege and an honour to serve the Church family as Moderator; to witness and be present in the lives of our people is sacred – in conversations, sharing meals, praying together and face-to-face – is exceptional.

I will share with you some of the highlights and experiences over the past 12 months. The Church in all its courts – presbyteries, parishes, and communities – have been very gracious, generous and hospitable. There is incredible love and respect in our Church, and in our people.

To date, we have attended all seven presbyteries. All are on the same journey, and not surprisingly, face very similar issues, challenges and barriers.

The calibre of our people is inspiring: your heart, your devotion and strength of character is unbelievable. We saw so much. We experienced such dedication. This is your Church.

In meetings early on, the Church Property Trustees shared and explained so much of their work. They are professionals of the highest qualifications in their fields, serving their Church and offering their services.

The Treaty of Waitangi dawn devotions was an unforgettable experience. I felt strongly the mana and spirit of Waitangi. There was a sense of sacredness, of silence that spoke of those forebears, history and of life. My love and respect for the tangata whenua and the manuhiri was at its highest point.

The week-long gathering with the Uniting Church of Australia (president and their state moderators) and the Methodist Church of Weteriana Aotearoa (former President) in Rotorua was a learning experience. We have many issues in common and on many other issues we are poles apart. We have a close working relationship with both churches.

The massacre at the mosques in Christchurch was a sad blot on our history. It was, and will always be, a devastating part of our journey as a nation. We all rose to the occasion. Our churches, ministers and chaplains were exceptional. They gave their all, were emptied, but they kept going and would not rest.

Connect at Ohope Marae was an uplifting experience with our young leaders. There were great plans and preparation as well

as passionate speakers and solid teaching with wonderful and loving care provided by our Te Aka Puaho family. Our future is in good hands.

Ruth and I attended the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV) General Assembly. The incredible history of their Church and the country's political past is fascinating. Presbyterianism is the largest and most influential religion in Vanuatu. In their history, Samoan Missionaries (LMS) London Missionary Society were the first to evangelise Vanuatu in 1845. The folks of Vanuatu are grateful to our Church and New Zealand as a nation for our investment in their land, finance and resources, but are mostly grateful for our people.

Council for World Mission (CWM) general secretaries met in Rotorua for a week. The Presbyterian Church and Congregational Union of New Zealand (CUNZ) hosted them. CWM (formerly known as London Missionary Society) is a church global community made up of 32 denominations, including our own. It was a great gathering of Christians from all over the world. We also took the CWM guests to our Ohope Marae. We all worshipped together at St John's in Rotorua.

Visiting our chaplains has been an eye-opener. I did not realise the full-reaching ministries of chaplaincy. Where there are people, you will find the chaplaincies. I have gained so much respect and awareness of this specialised ministry. They are Presbyterians doing ministry and mission amongst people. Our first instruction in Church life is, "go to all the world".

Presbyteries are, and will always be, the spine of our term serving our beloved Church. The last year of my term, we will do the same starting at presbyteries and reaching out to parishes, regionals, communities and individuals. We have experienced the love of God in all your Church families. Thank you. Bless you. We love you.

Since this is our last SPANZ for 2019, my best friend Ruth, and I want to wish you all your loved ones a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

"I came that you may have life, life in all its fullness," said our Lord Jesus. (John 10:10)

Blessings,
Fakaofu

CHURCHES RESPOND TO CHRISTCHURCH MOSQUE ATTACKS

Eight months have passed since the March attacks at two Christchurch mosques left 51 people slain and many others injured. Since then, churches have joined with other New Zealanders to heal broken hearts and knit communities together.

Predictably, the tragedy triggered disbelief, shock and compassion in equal measure. As much as they recoiled in horror at the spectre of terrorism in their midst, New Zealanders reached out to an overwhelmed Muslim community, seeking to shape a cross-cultural understanding that could take the country forward.

It was on March 15 that a lone gunman opened fire on worshippers attending Friday Prayers, first at the Al Noor Mosque in Riccarton, and then at the Linwood Islamic Centre. The perpetrator live-streamed the first attack on social media.

Stunned church and lay communities around the city scrambled to respond, while a disbelieving nation vowed to pledge wider support.

That pledge was at the heart of an unprecedented March 19 visit to Parliament by a multi-faith group invited by Speaker Trevor Mallard to join in the House's opening prayers. It brought together representatives of the Islamic, Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu and Ratana faiths and churches in a demonstration of unity in the searing aftermath of the attacks.

In their midst was Presbyterian Church Moderator, the Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio. On March 15, he was at a Church Leaders' conference in Rotorua; they issued a statement of support for victims and condemning the attacks on the day. Fakaofu joined with the multi-faith group at Parliament before flying down to Christchurch.

"There was a lot of emotion, a lot of tears," he recalls. "Bringing multiple faith groups to Parliament showed solidarity, it affirmed us as being one people under duress. I believe there is a lot more respect and tolerance for each other now."

He says signs of increased openness and understanding are emerging, not just from churches, but across different sectors across New Zealand, and is confident communities will continue to build bridges of understanding.

Presbyterian Church members in the immediate environs of the two mosques pushed aside their initial shock on March 15 to offer support.

Ken Shelley is senior pastor at King's Church in the central city. He is also involved in Te Raranga, the network of Christchurch's Christian churches that united in offering support to communities affected by the earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011.

"On March 19, church leaders and pastors gathered at the city's Majestic Church, centred on finding ways to support the Muslim community and to determine what our response should be. It attracted some 140 church leaders. We came up

with a three-point action plan; the first thing we did was issue a statement, agreed to by the leaders of all denominations."

The second was to organise a memorial service on March 21 in Latimer Square, attended by hundreds of people. It was an outdoor event that slipped almost soundlessly under the media radar. Ken describes it as a 'remarkable and meaningful' first opportunity for the invited Muslim community to share love and compassion from the Christian community.

Offerings of support were taken at that event - and afterwards - with Te Raranga acting as a conduit for the monies raised.

"Within a few days, we were able to give the Muslim community \$140,000 to meet their immediate needs," Ken says. "We knew other agencies were collecting, but we wanted this to go straight into the hands of the local imams - and it did. More money then came in. Overall, we have directed \$200,000 to the Muslim community, and that is outside anything given through Victim Support."

Those on the receiving end "expressed enormous gratitude" for that support, says Ken. An early email he received from the Linwood Mosque imam, Ibrahim Abdelhalim, was heartfelt: "On behalf of the Muslim community I would like to thank you so much for your people who are standing strong with us, which gives us a lot of warm feelings."

The third action taken by Te Raranga was to raise awareness of the Islamic faith and culture amongst the general population.



The March 19 memorial service at Majestic Square in Christchurch was organised by the Te Raranga Christian churches network, and was attended by many church-goers and leaders.

Rev Jonathan Barb, right, Linwood Avenue Union Church minister, with Imam Lateef from the Linwood Islamic Centre.

“Several churches held seminars, training and information evenings. Some great things have happened, and while the immediate need has come and gone, a number of things are still very much alive,” Ken says. “One example is the churches’ involvement with organisations that are helping resettle migrants. It’s part of a nationwide programme run by government agencies through local churches; we will continue to be involved in that.”

Rev Jonathan Barb, Linwood Avenue Union Church minister, was in his office penning his sermon just 1.5km from Linwood Islamic Centre when the attack started. “I’m from America, so this kind of hatred and violence is nothing new to me. However, I couldn’t believe it was happening here in Christchurch!”

Everything planned for that Sunday’s service ‘went out the window’. Instead, he addressed the tragedy then led an open mic session where people shared their feelings of confusion, anger and heartbreak. Afterwards, they walked down to the cordon to lay flowers and pray.

“There were many in the congregation who felt compelled to help, but who didn’t feel comfortable reaching out to Muslims due to their own cultural and religious ignorance,” Jonathan says. “So, I decided to run a six-week study series, using ‘Friendship First Course’ resource material designed to equip Christians with basic knowledge on the religious and cultural principles of Islam. I liked

the course because at its core is the idea to understand Islam better. That has been our focus.”

The course ran from late May to early July, and Jonathan hopes to repeat it at some stage in order to maintain inter-faith relations and dialogue. “I don’t want it to be a short-lived token experiment, but rather a long-term effort that is grounded in God’s love for others.”

Wary of how quickly things ‘go back to normal’ for those not directly affected by the attacks, Jonathan is also building on a pre-March 15 concept he had for outreach, and now hosts regular meetings between churches with the aim of building collegiality. The local imam has expressed an interest in joining the group.

“New Zealand can show the world what love really looks like, but only if we stay committed to it.”

The sharp barbs of racism are not new for Monica Mealy-Barnes, a woman of African-American heritage and an elder at St Albans Presbyterian Church in Palmerston North. She was doing a social work placement with the Red Cross in March, and after the attacks joined colleagues at the city’s Cook Street Mosque to pray for Christchurch’s Muslim communities.

“I was wearing my head scarf at the time. When I was walking back to the Red Cross office, a white man I did not know approached me and said: ‘You go back home, we don’t want you here!’ I said to him, ‘I have to respond to you in love.

I hope you find peace and joy today in some part of your dark heart’.”

The man ran off, Monica says, deterred possibly by her American accent, possibly by her lack of fear. Racism has been her constant companion, at home in America and elsewhere. “It does not go away. These vile, malicious and racist attacks were meant to kill and destroy two faith communities. But it has emboldened a community, a city and a nation to respond with compassion, care and loving kindness, even as we have become more cautious as individuals.”

Some members of Christchurch’s Presbyterian congregations were swept into the turmoil as events unfolded on March 15 – simply because of the jobs they did.

Warren Campbell has been a police officer for 31 years with a part-time role linking him to what is called the Special Search Group. They work on serious crime scenes – assaults, homicides and the like – setting up equipment to facilitate examination by specialists and ensuring crime scenes aren’t contaminated. He is also a long-time member of the Cashmere Presbyterian Church, where he is their property convenor.

Warren was off duty at the time of the attacks but was called in. “At that stage, we were told a number of people had been killed – initially we thought 13 to 16, which in itself was horrendous. But I was shocked when I heard how massive it was.



Hanging from the lectern at Cashmere Presbyterian Church are some of the origami paper peace cranes sent to the church from a Community College in the American state of Pittsburgh.

King's Church senior pastor Ken Shelley speaking at the Christchurch church leaders' meeting after the mosque attacks.

"I went first to Deans Avenue and then onto Linwood Avenue – at both places I was involved in setting up transition areas for the investigators," he recalls. "I remember seeing the bodies, some lying outside at Deans Avenue ... one was just a child. That was when reality set in, when I saw how shocking and brutal it had been."

Driven by necessity to focus on the job at hand, Warren pushed thoughts of the bigger picture from his mind. He worked both scenes over the next four to five days, first protecting the evidence and then protecting the international guests who streamed through. It was only later that the magnitude of it really sank in.

"I had never been involved in anything like that before, and even though I had been through police courses where we talked about terror attacks, we never expected it to come here. It's changed a lot of things, so while in some ways it has been 'business as usual' in terms of my job, there is an over-riding awareness of how random such an event can be."

If positives can be found, they are for Warren in the pride that swells his heart for a police force that delivered, on the day and afterwards, and for the warm response from people everywhere. "It's something of an eye-opener to see. We really are a generous nation of people. I guess it's untested until something like this happens."

A deep sadness enveloped Rev Dr Matthew Jack on hearing of the attacks. The Knox

Presbyterian Church minister replaced his planned material for the Sunday service with hastily penned and 'fairly unpolished prayers and a raw sermon'.

"We wrote thoughts to God, words for our neighbours and lit candles," he says. Thoughts written by the congregation were transcribed and hand-delivered to the Al Noor Mosque, and 'blu-tacked' to the windows.

Matthew contributed both to a March 15 interdenominational letter of support to the Christchurch Muslim community, in which they described the attacks as an 'unconscionable act' and said, 'as members of two faith traditions, born out of a shared Abrahamic inheritance, we stand in solidarity with you'.

On April 4, he added his name to an interdenominational submission in support of the Arms Amendment Bill. It stated: "We believe that all people in our community should know that they dwell in safety, in a society in which the slaughter of innocents, whatever their religion or ethnicity, is unthinkable."

The opening of a new branch of the gun store that sold weapons to the shooter makes Matthew question whether moves to reduce arms is working. "Human agency is the key, and tools for human agency are significant in the execution (I choose that word deliberately). Of course, 51 people and a saddened city can't help but believe that semi-automatic guns are part of the problem for us."

"Why does our world produce people who hate? Why do we, who speak of our home as some kind of idyllic sanctuary at the bottom of the world, put up with people owning machine guns? Why do we allow people, made in the sacred image of God, to be despised?"

As New Zealand wrestles with such questions, support continues to pour in from around the world. Cashmere Presbyterian's Rev Silvia Purdie says her church received an unexpected parcel from the maths department of the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh. Inside were 100 origami peace cranes, sent with the college's good wishes for peace and healing.

An October 30, a talk on *Understanding Islam from a Christian Perspective* with Elim Church senior pastor Dr Adam Dodds is on Dunedin's Flagstaff Community Church's calendar. Flagstaff's minister Rev Brendon McRae says he hopes to host an information evening with Dr Dodds as interest levels continue to grow.

As the waves of grief continue to ebb and flow with the aftermath of the attack in and out of the media, emerging in churches is a steely resolve to find ways to dilute the power of terror.

* *The alleged shooter is due to stand trial on 2 June next year. He is charged with 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder, and one charge of terrorism. The accused, who allegedly has links to white supremacy, has pleaded not guilty*

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



PRESBYTERIAN CONNECTION for global inter-faith movement

Wellington's Rev Ryhan Prasad is a founding member of a new global inter-faith peace-making programme.

The Khandallah Presbyterian Church minister spent three weeks in August travelling with an Islamic imam from Indonesia and a Jewish rabbi from America.

Rabbi Eliot Baskin, Ustad Oji Fahrurroji and Ryhan stayed for a week in each other's cities: Denver, Jakarta and Wellington. They also went to Christchurch where they visited the Al Noor Mosque and mayor Lianne Dalziel.

They attended services of all three faiths in each city, had an inter-faith service and held panel discussions to break down stereotypes by showing their faiths were similar.

Says Ryhan: "There is more that brings us together than divides us. We all share the golden rule: 'love thy neighbour'. We all work for social justice for the poor and marginalised. We all emphasise community. And we all disagree with the radical things that are happening in the names of our faiths.

"We are three Abrahamic faiths, sharing Abraham as a common ancestor. We are close in terms of how we worship. None of the aims of our faiths is to do with terrorism. We want to say, 'The radical voice is not who we are'.

"It is important for the world to hear that the three faiths are getting to know each other, not hiding away and just doing their own thing. We should be emphasising that we are mainstream and moderate and proud of it."

From right: Khandallah Presbyterian Church's Rev Ryhan Prasad, with Islamic imam Ustad Oji Fahrurroji from Indonesia, and Jewish rabbi Eliot Baskin from the United States. They travelled to each other's home cities as part of a new global inter-faith peace-making programme.

This is the first of the 1000 Abrahamic Circles, a global initiative that was pitched at the Paris Peace Forum. It was adopted by the United Nations and the first one has been funded by the Danish Government.

With a Jewish rabbi and an Islamic imam on board, the organisers were looking for a Christian minister – specifically a New Zealander in the wake of the Christchurch mosque massacre. One of Ryhan's congregation was acting as New Zealand Ambassador to Indonesia and met the founder of the Circles movement in the aftermath of the Christchurch mosque attacks. "When asked for a suggestion, he said 'I know just the guy!'" says Ryhan.

"They Skyped me and told me they wanted to do 1000 circles in 10 years. This is a grassroots movement that lets everyone know that we are working for good.

"I was not planning on going into the interfaith arena, but I was motivated by the constant negative media messages about our faiths. If there is something in the media about religion, it is usually negative, when what we are doing is trying to make the world a better place."

Ryhan has ministered at Khandallah Presbyterian Church for eight years. "A lot of my ministry is around young people, children and families; about bringing Presbyterian back into the mainstream. But this came out of nowhere and pinged

something off in me in terms of what we can do together against the radical voice."

Ryhan came back home with "a sense of how little we are and how we need to open our eyes".

"Indonesia is the third biggest democracy in the world and the largest Islamic nation. It is 88 per cent Muslim, but really moderate and open to other faiths. A lot of New Zealanders do not know that, and this is a relatively near neighbour."

In the aftermath of the Christchurch shootings, Ryhan believes it is important that we know our neighbours.

"The people in Indonesia may be different culturally, but they are similar to New Zealanders in that they are welcoming, open, polite and enquiring. Many people asked me, 'What is New Zealand like?' There is rising nationalism around the world and we need to embrace our neighbours rather than building walls against them."

Ryhan believes New Zealanders have the personal attributes to make a difference in this realm.

"One of our strengths is our ability to be open and to question. One of our weaknesses is that we are shy. We don't see our strengths and we don't speak up."

Ryhan will continue to lead post-Circle interfaith peace-building efforts as part of this initiative, and has recently held a series of conversations Three Abrahamic Faiths in Khandallah.

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)

50TH

ANNIVERSARY OF

Congregational Union and Presbyterian Church fellowship



Rt Rev Owen Baragwanath greets Rev Setu Masina, one many Congregational Union ministers welcomed into the Presbyterian Church at the 1969 General Assembly.

The Presbyterian Church took important steps on its multi-ethnic journey in 1969 when General Assembly voted to receive Congregational Union ministers and churches into the Church.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark decision, which saw 28 ministers and 26 congregations spread from Whangarei in the north to Invercargill in the south, warmly welcomed into the Presbyterian Church.

Original proposals talked about merging the two churches, but that wording didn't find favour with Congregational Church Assembly, who instead voted to ask that "the Presbyterian Church Assembly receive into fellowship" its churches and ministers.

This month, the anniversary was marked with a special service at Newton Pacific Islanders Church, Edinburgh St, Auckland – one of the original congregational churches received into the Presbyterian Church.

The Newton Pacific Islanders' Congregational Church, as it was known previously, was the first formal Pacific church community in New Zealand. It formed in 1947 to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of Pacific immigrants, which at the time numbered fewer than 3,000.

Fast forward to today and the Pacific Islands community in New Zealand is around 300,000, and the Presbyterian Church continues to provide a spiritual home for generations of Pasifika people.

On Sunday, 3 November – 50 years to the day – Newton Pacific Island Presbyterian Church, hosted a combined service led by the Congregational Union New Zealand (CUNZ) chairperson Tale Hakeagaiki, and Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio, who says

that the impact of the merger on both denominations was significant.

"For the Presbyterian family, it was an out of this world experience. Literally thousands were added to the Presbyterian roll and ministry. It was a transformational moment.

"We received Pacific Islanders with all their languages, cultures, traditions and differences as Christians. They brought gifts, dreams, aspirations, and future hopes into the Presbyterian faith community. It was a major event for all concerned."

Fakaofu also acknowledges that it was also a time of sadness: while the majority of congregational churches voted to become part of the Presbyterian Church, a small number of congregations and ministers remained in the CUNZ.

"It was an event that shattered their community. Today, it is still a huge disappointment. The CUNZ are rebuilding, refocussing and moving on."

At the special service stories were retold, memories recalled, and peace and gratitude to God acknowledged says Fakaofu.

A number of special guests, including two of the 28 ministers received into the Presbyterian Church, addressed those present. Two children of Rev Leuatea Sio, who in 1969 was the Chairperson of CUNZ, also spoke.

Rev Dr Steve Taylor, principal at Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, spoke at the service and reflected on some of the ways that retaining a Pacific context for theological education, which was very important to the 1969 special committee considering integration, worked out in the years immediately after the integration.

"In the ten years from 1971-1980, 28 people born in the Pacific would enter the hall. These included 18 from Western Samoa, six from Cook Islands, four from the Niue Islands and one from Ellice (Tuvalu). This represented 19 percent of the student cohort during that decade, and changed the Theological Hall," says Steve.

"All the students training for ministry found themselves learning Pacific Island customs and Māori. A series of race relations seminars were organised and, in 1975, there was work to secure Polynesian literature for the library, raise funds for research into Polynesian subjects and printed articles in Pacific languages in a student magazine," he said.

As well as the special service in Auckland, parishes around the country marked the anniversary in their own ways. The Pacific Presbytery is planning an event in November says clerk, Winston Timaloa.

"Pacific Presbytery is now the formal and officially recognised voice of Pacific people, and the first 40 years pilgrimage has been a truly wilderness experience for many Pacific Islanders, finally crossing the Jordan river in the last 10 years with the formation of PI Synod and later into the promised land of being granted presbytery powers.

"It is like a marriage, I guess. It took 50 years for the two to begin to know one another better. We have come a long way in our journey together.

"We are paving a way forward that acknowledges our Pacific forebears that pioneered for our Pacific Island communities to be established in the Presbyterian Church. It is the heart of our Pacific Presbytery to honour our ancestors' vision to develop a Church for present and future Pacific generations to call home

Jose Reader Spanz

JOURNEY FROM REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT TO BUYING OWN HOME

When the Miramar Uniting Church helped Olivia Hming and her family, refugees from Myanmar, to settle in Wellington, neither knew how life changing their relationship would become.

On the first Sunday after Olivia Hming and her family moved into their Strathmore house, they walked to the nearest church. They did not have a car, and could not drive anyway.

"After the service, the minister, Rev Paul Prestidge, asked us for our address. He said that when he had time, he would visit us. The next day he was there!" says Olivia.

He continued to visit on Tuesday afternoons for Bible Study, but also provided practical help. "He found a woman who was a curtain maker and brought her son to measure up. I don't know who paid for it. Paul said it was a donation," says Olivia. Two parishioners organised driving lessons.

That was in 2013, six years ago. Olivia had previously been in Malaysia for three years waiting for resettlement, while some of her family were still in Myanmar. In an interview with the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, she was told the family would be resettled in New Zealand – but had never heard of the place.

"My first question was, 'Where is New Zealand, and what is it like there?' We only knew about the United States as many of our friends had gone there, and we wanted to go there too," says Olivia.

Arriving at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre was a shock after Malaysia's dense population and tall buildings. "It was so quiet!" says Olivia.



Former refugees Olivia Hming and husband Kap worked hard to save the deposit for a home in the Wellington region. Unable to use qualifications gained in Myanmar, they work long hours to make sure their five children will have opportunities.

Food was a problem as the family wanted their usual diet of meat, vegetables and rice rather than bread, cereals and milk, but former refugees from the Chin district living in Auckland came to the rescue with a rice cooker and ingredients.

Olivia was disappointed when told they had to move to Wellington. "We wanted to stay in Auckland as we could speak our language, Falam Chin, with our new friends there."

In Wellington, four Red Cross volunteers helped them in the first six months, but attending Miramar Uniting Church made a real difference to their successful resettlement. "We are very thankful to Paul, and to Rebecca Wilson, the Sunday School teacher. We still go on Sunday mornings, even though we now live in Naenae. On Sunday afternoons we go to the Chin church, Grace Hill Church, which is held at the Miramar Uniting Church building."

Olivia gave up her weekend job as a cleaner in a rest home because she wanted to attend church on Sundays. She worked at Nisa, a lingerie company that employs former refugees, but recently left to start her own business making clothes as she has 15 years' experience in dressmaking. Her husband Kap, is working as a painter, having been a hotel supervisor in Malaysia.

People have been intrigued as to how a former refugee family with five children (two born after the family's arrival in

New Zealand) could afford to buy a house in Wellington. "We saved money for the deposit and put it in Kiwisaver." They found the ex-state house on TradeMe, for \$500,000. The high quality Hutt Valley soil is a bonus as the family grows its own vegetables.

The best thing about her life now, says Olivia, is that her children have opportunities. "We cannot use our qualifications here, but our children will have New Zealand qualifications. They can learn everything like Kiwi kids because their English has improved." Her eldest daughter is deaf. They used to communicate in her made-up signals, but have now learnt New Zealand Sign Language.

Her greatest concern is that her children will be influenced by others. "I worry that a lot of people in New Zealand are not religious. I remind my kids that if they have a friend who is non-religious, they need to try to get them to become a Christian. I say, 'Do not follow them. Be careful about how you live and how you talk.'"

She laughs now about her initial negative response to the news that they would be resettled in New Zealand. "God is very good because he brought us to New Zealand – even though we knew nothing about it. But I always had a faith that it would turn out well."

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)

Tikanga Māori highlight of 2019 Connect



Speakers and attendees at Connect 2019 outside the Church's Te Maungarongo marae in Ohope.

This year's PYM national youth leaders' conference, Connect, had an element that made it uniquely different from its predecessors: for the first time, it was held at the Church's Te Maungarongo marae in Ohope.

The decision to hold Connect at a venue that purposefully immersed delegates in Tikanga Māori dovetailed perfectly with the 2019 theme *Whakakotahitanga* or, *Gathering as one people under Christ*.

Past Connects have been held at Christian campgrounds or at Presbyterian schools around the country. It was felt that partnering with Te Aka Puaho in a celebration of bicultural partnership would be of particular benefit to youth leaders this time around.

The marae hosted over 160 attendees from all over New Zealand from 19-21 July.

Moderator Rt Rev Fakaofa Kaio described it as "an extraordinary, spiritual and meaningful time with God and with each other", and said the time spent eating together, conversing with one another and praying in groups was a "mountain top" experience for the Church's youth leaders.

"There was no generational barrier... we were one in Jesus Christ. Present were elders, ministers, lecturers and much older folks who have a love for youth ministry. Their presence gave the Connect forum a sense of family and faith community. Our Connect theme was on the mark."

Matt Chamberlin, PYM Director, says it was a privilege to work with the marae

and Christian education committees of Te Aka Puaho.

He describes Connect 2019 as a "truly unique project" and says both he and Gordon Fitch, PYM National Manager, felt strongly led to explore the possibility of holding Connect 2019 at the Church's national marae at Ohope, despite its geographical isolation.

"We felt very strongly that we didn't just want to hire our Church's beautiful marae, rather we wanted to work in partnership with Te Aka Puaho," he says. "Everyone was so patient and so generous with their time and talents. We came looking to book a venue but ended up being welcomed into a family and a new home."

He outlined five strong themes that emerged from the event – *turangawaewae* (a place to stand), *whakapono* (growing in our faith), *tikanga Māori* (customary practices), *hauora* (wellbeing), and *taura* (discipleship).

Matt says most of the attendees were youth leaders ranging in age from 18 years through to 80.

"We also had several ministers from different parishes come along with their youth leadership teams; we were delighted to have a good number of people both helping and attending from Te Aka Puaho. In addition, we had several guests participate from Vanuatu and Taiwan who were here under an exchange programme facilitated by Global Mission Co-ordinator, Rev Phil King. Our international guests were a fantastic addition. They were passionate, friendly, and contributed much to our weekend."

Matt says the inclusion of non-youth leaders is based on the understanding that many of the principles of best practice in youth ministry require input from a whole congregation.

"For example, we see that one of the strongest predictors of long-term faith for young people is that they have strong meaningful relationships with other people of faith from across the generations. Second, we continually receive positive feedback around the culture and vibe set at Connect. I think it would be one of the most positive gatherings that regularly happens in our Church. We've even had people suggest that at least parts of General Assembly could be modelled off what we do at Connect."

Speaking at Connect 2019 were retired Te Aka Puaho minister Rev Ra Koia; James Beck, who is well-regarded in New Zealand as the Kaihanga o Ngā Mea/ director of development and delivery at The Parenting Place; and Sala Tiatia, a previous Connect speaker recognised for his practical insights on encouraging young people to reach their potential.

Their input hit the right note with many of those attending.

Vanessa Sinclair, a volunteer who leads the youth group at Dunedin's Knox Church, was attending her first Connect. She says: "The key speakers and workshops were wonderful. They offered some insightful and interesting stories, and food for thought about connections in youth ministry, especially as the way we interact changes due to technology. It was absolutely amazing. It's a wonderful



Participants at Connect 2019 gather in prayer.



Guest speaker Sala Tiatia presenting a workshop at Connect 2019.

time to learn and grow in your own faith, while talking and exploring with others. I suggest you bring a notebook next time, to jot down all you can!"

Other comments were directed to organisers of Connect 2019 through a feedback survey.

One reply said: "God planted in me a desire to understand tikanga and Te Reo... I am now working in a community where I need these skills. Connect helped me address my prejudices and struggles; I was challenged deeply. Now I have to suck it up, leave my pride at the door and dig into this!"

Another said there were too many highlights from which to pick. "I loved being able to talk to such a variety of people in different areas of youth ministry, and to see that we are not alone in our ministry."

"Beyond thankful for this amazing experience," said another, "super-excited for next year!"

Brad Kelderman, Southern Presbyterian Youth Advisor, described the conversations had at Connect as "life-giving" and said the event had been blessed by amazing speakers and workshop presenters.

"They encouraged us and challenged us in our own faith journeys and in our ministry to young people," he says. "We reconnected back with our whanau at Te Maungarongo, we connected with our fellow youth leaders, and we connected with God."

Another Connect first-timer was Michelle Loveday, community pastor at St John's

Presbyterian Church in Hastings. She went along hoping to network with other leaders, learn from the workshops and find new inspiration.

"The highlights for me were the bicultural experience of meeting on our marae for the first time, and being immersed in the history, culture, language and spirituality of this event. The worship and keynote addresses were beautiful, the discipleship group sessions affirming... I was overwhelmed by the manaakitanga and aroha I felt. The most useful takeaway was reinforcement of the belief that in young adult ministry, as in all ministry, the most important element is the nurturing of our relationship with God and one another.

"This event went beyond my expectations," Michelle says. "I found material from the workshops very useful."

Te Aka Puaho more than stepped up to the task in terms of meeting the practical requirements involved in hosting Connect. Honey and Tamiana Thrupp led Te Aka Puaho's efforts.

"It was a fantastic weekend," Honey says. "We've never hosted an event like this at the marae before, besides the General Assembly powhiri about six years ago. Te Aka Puaho involvement was to just be there for the team, making sure all their needs were met.

"Matt and Gordon were amazing to work with. They were very understanding of tikanga, whakawhanaungatanga and whakakotahitanga, and I think that's what led to better understanding of each other. If there was one challenge we took away from the weekend, it was

to be more proactive in our own ministry, to make ourselves more available to the young leaders and give them wider opportunities to grow in leadership."

Matt says the event theme had been provided by members of Te Aka Puaho during one of the planning meetings.

"Alongside the overarching theme of whakakotahitanga, we wanted our participants to come away with a sense of turangawaewae – a place to stand," he explains. "Our hosts really wanted to emphasise that Ohope Marae is for everyone in the Church, and that it can be a place to stand, a place of belonging."

That linked strongly with the theme of tikanga Māori, Matt adds, one which sought to provide people with a greater understanding of key aspects of tikanga and the partnership that exists between Te Aka Puaho and wider Church.

Another important focus at Connect 2019 was the practices of intentional discipleship, says Matt.

"This year we wanted to provide our participants with some experiential learning around key practices of discipleship," he says. "This was done through participants forming small discipleship groups and working through questions and practices that helped them process and implement ideas and principles shared at the conference."

The upshot, he suggests, was very encouraging.

"We received some very positive feedback from many participants about this new addition to Connect."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

NORTHERN YOUTH CONCERNED FOR ENVIRONMENT



Twenty youth group members from Northern Presbytery cleaned up rubbish from Maraetai Beach in South Auckland.

Not a day goes by when the media isn't filled with grim science-based stories of the planet facing extinction of species at alarming rates, of climate change-related weather disasters, shrinking icebergs and temperature extremes. Not to mention those humans and animals displaced by such cataclysmic change.

According to experts, we have only around 12 years to limit a climate change catastrophe.

Concerned by the lack of action on this urgent matter, the Northern Presbyterian Youth Forum decided to focus on what they could do to help.

Hannah North, Acting Youth Co-ordinator of Northern Presbyterian, says youth group leaders from her region met after last year's General Assembly to discuss how they could "take care of the world we live in".

"We spent time after the General Assembly discussing how we could be the most effective and efficient in our approach," says Hannah. "We knew that a day or a week wasn't going to cut it – that we had to think bigger than that."

The team came up with Green Month, nominating September 2019 as the month they would organise a series of events to help address climate change.

"We chose September to coincide with a Season of Creation, the international programme organised by a number of churches to highlight global action towards climate change."

Around 10 youth groups from the Northern Presbyterian region came up with a range of initiatives, including

collecting shredded paper from churches and donating it to Auckland Zoo for use in animal cages.

"Our churches were particularly responsive to that and donated a lot of paper," says Hannah.

The main initiative was a beach clean-up on 21 September. Two beaches were chosen – Kohimarama in Auckland's east and Maraetai in South Auckland – as they were easy to get to.

Around 20 youth group members turned up to each beach at 10am on Saturday 21 September and spent two hours picking up litter from the beach and surrounding areas.

Hannah, who attended the clean-up at Kohimarama, says her team of volunteers collected around 10 bags of rubbish in two hours.

"When we first got there, we noticed the beach was really clean so we wondered why we were even there! But then we started looking at the grass section next to the beach and realised that there was a lot of unseen rubbish under the plants, including bottles, fast food wrappers and cigarette butts."

Although proud of their efforts, Hannah says the beach clean-up is just the tip of the iceberg. "As humans, we all need to do more to take care of the earth for the future. But as Christians, it's even more important because the Bible teaches us that the earth isn't actually ours to own, that it belongs to God who created it for us to enjoy. Which means we have an obligation to take care of it."

Hannah also believes that caring for God's creation gives Christians a more tangible connection to God. "We are here to serve and take care of his planet."

She says there are plans to stage another Green Month next year and hoped to widen the net to include church members of every age.

"I've heard from several people who are interested in being involved, which is a great sign."

She also adds that the message of living sustainably and being eco-conscious extends beyond Green Month.

"One of the youth groups committed to walking to youth group instead of driving during Green Month and that's something we'll be trying to do from now on. It's all about doing simple things that, in the end, can add up to make a massive change."

For one participant, 17-year-old Lisa Matheson from Papakura East Presbyterian, the Maraetai beach clean-up was a great experience.

"I expected there to be a lot of rubbish as Maraetai can be very busy," says Lisa. "I was very surprised there wasn't litter everywhere but instead we had to seek it out."

Lisa adds she enjoyed being with the small group caring for the beach. "I felt that people care for Maraetai Beach more than some other beaches as it wasn't as messy as I expected. It wasn't hard to pick up any item that takes away from the natural beach environment, more people should do it."

Sharon Stephenson Spanz

Caring for Creation takes root in two parishes



Local school students joined in to help plant Pohutukawa Presbyterian's rain garden.

Two Presbyterian churches are taking a boots-and-all approach to caring for the environment in which they sit by committing to 'Caring for Creation', one of the Presbyterian Church's five faces of mission.

In 2018, General Assembly addressed Christians' need to be responsible stewards of God's creation, and called to action every congregation, church school and social service agency linked to the Church.

Two churches – Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian in Auckland and Dunedin's Flagstaff Community Church – have found that work done in their own back yard has segued into broader partnerships in sustainability.

Flagstaff Community Church meets in two locations – Halfway Bush and Wakari. In mid-2017 a workday held to tidy the Wakari church grounds led to the discovery of what became a rigorous restoration project on adjacent Dunedin City Council land, through which School Creek runs. It was discovered that space left behind after pines were removed from the council land was rapidly filling with native plants.

"We decided to create a public track through both the council and church land, so people could appreciate the beauty of the creek and bush environments," says project leader Neil Brown.

The church formed a group to tackle the necessary planning and funding applications and access expert help in native planting. The local primary school environmental group joined in helping with stream care, rubbish removal and pest control. Native seed packs offered to parishes through PCANZ national office for a Caring for Creation Lent 2019

project were pre-planted in seed trays in preparation for planting out during the church's Matariki celebrations from June 28-30.

Mid-way through those celebrations a group of 24 people spent two hours planting at the site; they were Flagstaff church members, locals and people from different environmental projects.

Flagstaff Community Church minister Rev Brendon McRae says the project was aimed at restoring an ecosystem and engaging the Wakari community in "actively caring for its piece of earth".

"Matariki signifies our connection to the environment, and caring for creation starts in our own back yard," he says. Life is returning to the creek, with crayfish and rare native fish recently spotted.

Neil says church members are busy raising seeds for future plantings. "We have grand designs for future expansion and are applying to various sources to fund other requirements."

When Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church opened earlier this year at Maraetai, south-east of Auckland and adjacent to Omana Regional Park, there was a real sense of responsibility for the space it inhabited.

The site was large with little funding for landscaping. Faye Clark led an enthusiastic team in overseeing much of the planting and landscaping of the church grounds, and sought collaboration and support. That led them into partnerships with two schools with an active environmental curriculum in place – Beachlands School and Maraetai Primary School – and with Omana Regional Park head ranger, Mags Ramsey,

with whom they regularly consult on how best to manage the area.

"We are keen to be 'good neighbours', both in pest and weed control, and in replanting indigenous species to encourage the return of birds, as well as insects and lizards," says Faye. "We want an environment that is friendly to their sustainability."

The church was required by council to install a rain garden to deal with stormwater overflow from the tanks on the church's large roof, and runoff from carpark areas. Faye describes it as a 'complex pit construction' which filters impurities and must be planted with specified native species.

"Water is only meant to be visible for less than 48 hours after rain, and then no more than 25cm deep," she says. "It requires regular hand weeding and surface maintenance. It is not optional; its upkeep will be regular and somewhat labour intensive."

Enviro teachers and senior students from both primary schools, and a sustainability consultant from the Botanic Gardens, recently put in the plants that had been raised from seed, while church members provided transport and some additional manpower. Faye says there are plans to complete the rain garden planting project next year.

Before the building was even consented, Pohutukawa's congregation had expressed a desire for a 'memory' walk around the property's perimeter. Faye says a start has been made, but that project is likely to be over a decade in the making.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



NEW FORM OF CHURCH IS GATHERING FAITH

Julie Penno, right, has a part-time role with Kiwi Church promoting fresh ideas for intergenerational engagement.

A desire to find innovative ways of journeying in faith is what led Christchurch's Rev Dr Darryl Tempero to start Kiwi Church under the Presbyterian banner five years ago. He was seeking new ways to 'express' church more authentically, ways that reached across the generations and involved much more 'doing' than listening.

It was a brave move. Darryl's vision effectively turned conventional practice for worship on its head.

Kiwi Church has become a network of communities rather than a single entity. "Place isn't as important," he says, "because we believe everyone is in mission all of the time."

Kiwi Church centres more on relationship than a set programme, it encourages participation and questioning over the standard 'preaching' model, and it connects God's story with the reality of people's daily lives. Gatherings are purposefully small so that relationship remains at the heart of each. No 'offerings' are taken, save for the Christmas 'Project Boaz' which collects to provide gifts for struggling families outside the church community.

"We listen to God and to each other," Darryl explains. "The main difference is the way we learn together. We all know listening passively is not the best way to learn, yet we persist in doing that. I question that approach. Of course, preaching has a place, but people learn much more about the Bible through the discoveries they make themselves."

There are various Kiwi Church communities, each one 'intentional and diverse' to better fit with individual faith requirements. Each reflects a community of people seeking to explore God in ways that differ from the usual expression of church. *The Gym* is a fortnightly gathering to increase inner fitness through discipleship and spiritual exercise; *Rituals of Healing* explore the creation of a process that aids healing from the past; *Renovate* helps people assess their 'faith house' and find a new way of being; *Outdoors* takes the search for God outdoors in an exploration of the theology of creation; and *Reel Life* looks for glimpses of the divine by watching movies together.

Another community, the *Thin Place*, started in late 2013. It references the Celtic description of a place where God seems

particularly close, where a tissue thin barrier separates heaven and earth. In the Kiwi Church context, it brings people of all ages together in a very personal exploration of faith.

"We wanted it to be participatory, not clergy-led," says Darryl, an innovative thinker who for the past eight years has been doing mission coaching with Presbytery and whose doctorate focuses on new ways of being church in the Kiwi context. He facilitates some of the gatherings, but not all. It's intergenerational, a contemplative, experimental place for questioning around faith, particularly for those who may be returning to it after leaving behind the conventional church model.

Anywhere from a handful up to 45 people attend the fortnightly sessions, and as much as that signals success, Darryl suggests large numbers risk losing the intimacy. The youngest is around 10 months, the oldest 84 – that intergenerational element is at the heart of *Thin Place* and other Kiwi Church activities.

Earlier this year, Darryl secured Press Go and Alpine Mission funding to support the part-time involvement of Julie Penno to help Kiwi Church, and *Thin Place*, more effectively express its intergenerational focus.

Julie has rich and extensive experience in children's ministry, wider education and speech language therapy. She works part-time with the Church's Kids Friendly ministry, has a masters' in education and is doing graduate studies in intergenerational ministry. Her role as coach across all Kiwi Church activities sees her coming alongside the communities encouraging them to think and be intentionally intergenerational within the ministry, and helping discover fresh ways to tell God's story.

She likens the gatherings to a family meal, where all ages come together at the table in open conversation. *Thin Place* worship is expressed through play, art and craft, song, discussion and prayer – it is simple, and shifts organically.

"We participate as a community, encourage each other's faith," she says. "We all have skills and can coach each other ... but it is very spontaneous. I love it. You never know what's going to happen. It's messy, it's risky ... just like a family meal."

Viv Posselt **Spanz**

Netball coach awarded for 50 year commitment to women and sport



Three generations of Martha Taru's family have been involved with the Pacific Island Church Netball Club for over seven decades. From right, Martha Taru, granddaughter Cyan (back), granddaughter Astyn (front) and daughter Ariki.

The president of Wellington's Pacific Island Church Netball Club, Martha Taru, has been honoured by Netball New Zealand.

Martha was presented with a Netball New Zealand Service Award for more than half a century of commitment to the game.

Martha's love for the game began at Newtown Primary School, she joined PIC after leaving Wellington East Girls College. When she had her two daughters, she stepped into administration and has been a coach and treasurer, and is currently club president.

In the Cook Island culture Martha was born into in Wellington, church and netball went hand in hand.

Her mother, Tekau Taru, now 85, is one of the women who founded the Pacific Island Church Netball Club – known as PIC – back in 1953.

"PIC Netball Club was started by a group of Cook Island women who were also members of the parish," says Martha. "It started out social, but it soon became competitive," she laughs, proud of the competitiveness that has made the club a real winner but also of the whanau atmosphere. "PIC is like a family. We treat the players as our own, and that is one reason why we punch above our weight.

"The club has only five teams, yet it holds first and second places in the top grade. The other three teams finished first, second and third in the second grade. No other club has ever achieved that sort of record," says Martha.

Like Martha, many of PIC's members are related to the club's original founders. Her own family's involvement covers three generations over seven decades.

Her daughter Ariki still plays for PIC, and she hopes her two grand-daughters will join too when they are old enough.

Martha recalls a very happy childhood with church at the core of family activity. "My Mum and Dad both belonged to the Pacific Island Presbyterian Church in Newtown. We lived in Daniell Street, near the church. I still feel I am part of the congregation though I do not often go. Ariki attends, and my grandchildren go to Sunday School."

Martha sees her Netball New Zealand Service Award as being a tribute to her mother and the other pioneers of the club rather than something for herself.

"I am very proud and grateful for the nomination and the award. It recognises the struggles my mother and my aunts went through in coming over here and settling in, and the hard work they put in to establishing the club. They had to fund-raise for their subs, equipment and uniforms. They trained outside in the wet and the cold, which they were not used to having come from a much warmer climate. Today, we train inside."

Martha's mother Tekau Vaike arrived in New Zealand alone at the age of 17, leaving behind her mothers and sisters in Rarotonga. She met her future husband

John Taru here in New Zealand, even though they came from the same island. They married and had four children.

All three of Tekau's daughters played for PIC as its star rose. Some club members became national netball icons, including Silver Ferns Margaret Matenga, Rita Fatialofa and Waimarama Taumanu.

Outside of netball Martha had a 30 year career in banking from which she recently retired. But it is unlikely she will retire from netball as she is now coaching her granddaughter's intermediate school team. "She asked me if I would coach them and I said yes, because I think it is important.

"I see my job as bringing individuals together and moulding them into a team with the skills and attitude to be able to compete with the best. But playing in a netball team also gives them life skills. They learn to play by the rules. They understand that there are rules you have to follow – in the game and in life.

"When I took them on a trip recently, I watched how well they worked together, how they problem-solved, how much they enjoyed each other's company and how much fun they had.

"After a game, I ask them, 'What do you think you did well? What did you do badly? What are you going to do about that?' They come up with the answers themselves. They know. It's a great learning curve."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



Making matters

God is a master maker, according to Proverbs 8:30. God delights in making, both at creation and among the human race. The chapter begins with the Maker calling in the streets, offering wisdom not inside the temple, but at the crossroads of life, not in the stillness of liturgy but the bustle of the city gates (1-3). The wisdom on offer is fit for daily purpose – words that lead to life offered at the door of every house (34-5).

Making mattered to theologians of the early Church, who wove relationships between God as maker and discipleship as God's children. Maximus the Confessor called Christian life a game played by children before God. In Acts, Dorcas created a fresh expression of church with the poor through mending and Lydia worked with fine purple cloth, while Paul, Priscilla and Aquila sustained their mission through the making of tents.

The place of making in mission intrigues me. So in recent months, I have researched Christmas Angel, a local church outreach that began in the north of England in 2014. The idea is simple: make hand-knitted angels, attach a tag, and leave for others to find.

Why make? Mystery in mission, was the answer according to founders, Methodist church ministers, Rob Wylie and David Wynd, whom I interviewed last month in Durham, England. Seeing a felted angel made by Lou Davis (a wonderfully talented pioneer Methodist church leader) a lightbulb went off for Rob and David: "People walk the same route to work every single day. Let's see what happens when they see something they don't normally see. What they make of the message will be up to them. An angel turns up and what might change?"

Christianity, like Christmas, has over the years, become increasingly wrapped in tinsel. What might happen if making, in the simplicity of a hand-made angel, was what mattered at Christmas?

What happened? Well, it seems that local English churches love making things. What began in 2014 with a few churches near Rob and David, was quickly taken up by churches all over Britain. In 2017, over 60,000 angels, each lovingly tagged, were yarn bombed throughout England. In the dark of winter, down country roads and up high streets, outside train stations and opposite local schools, hand-made knitted angels just turned up.

I was curious. What did the neighbours make of the making? Were yarnbombed angels a nuisance? I turned to social media as part of my research. Each knitted angel came with a hashtag (search online for "#XmasAngel") and I found the neighbours responding (tweeting) online. Words like "lovely" and "thanks" kept being repeated. For one person, the angels meant people were "thinking of us here". For another it was an experience of "divine intervention". A mother was moved to tears as she watched her children place their newly found angel atop the Christmas tree. Of the 1,100 responses (tweets), not one was negative. The making of knitted angels brought communities together, made visible the church and materialised joy and surprise in the experience of being found by an angel.

It all makes sense of the angels in the Christmas story. They were outdoors. They were making faith visible, not with their hands, but their voices with songs of peace and love for all humankind.

It also makes sense of the making in Proverbs 8. Making matters and mission needs to be "out and about" up streets and at the crossroads. Making matters as the Church becomes playful, turning "purl one and knit two together" into unspoken acts of public mission.

Are there makers in Presbyterian churches? Yvonne Wilkie, our Church's former archivist, recalls knitted nativities in Presbyterian history. But that was the past, and we all now live in the present.

The instructions are online (<https://www.christmasangel.net/>). They are simple enough that, as part of my research, I learnt to make one. Is anyone interested in making and mission, with a downunder #Kiwiangels hashtag? Or are Kiwi summers now too busy and too hot for making to matter?

- Rev Dr Steve Taylor, principal of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

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ITIM

HIGH INTEREST IN CHURCH FINANCIAL CONSOLIDATION

If financial consolidation doesn't sound like an exciting topic to you, don't tell Glen Williams as his genuine enthusiasm for the subject is boundless. He's a financial consolidation evangelist.

Having provided expert support to the Anglican Church and Scouts New Zealand for consolidation of their financial accounts, Glen is now expert consultant to the Presbyterian Church as it too begins the process.

Financial consolidation is a requirement for the Church under the Financial Reporting Act to ensure it doesn't lose its charitable status. Consolidation will see all parish and related entities financial accounts consolidated into General Assembly's year-end financial statements over the next two years.

Glen, and Sandra Kennerley Finance Manager of the Presbyterian Church, are helping presbyteries and parishes throughout the country with consolidation. They will be joined by PCANZ and presbytery jointly appointed parish support people in all presbytery regions.

The Church's financial consolidation process began earlier this year with a "practice" consolidation of the Kaimai and Te Aka Puaho 30 June 2019 end of year accounts. All other presbyteries and parishes will not need to include their financial information into General Assembly accounts until 30 June 2020.

Consolidation is a learning curve for everyone, says Sandra, but with Glen's experience, the Church is well placed to make the process as smooth as possible.

"After our roadshows with Kaimai, we conducted a survey with their treasurers to find out what more we could add to our

future presentations. This information, plus feedback at the roadshows, helped us to prepare resources such as a fact-sheet, videos, website pages, a dedicated email address for questions, and regular email updates.

"The roadshows have been a great opportunity to discuss the benefits of consolidation, including how it will make parish end of year reporting easier. Overall, we have had very positive feedback. Treasurers understand that we require very little from them, most of the work will be done by Assembly Office."

Something that smaller parishes have expressed interest in are affordable Xero software packages. "Through our partnership with Xero, we now have access to additional, cheaper Xero packages for those parishes that do not need the invoicing function provided by our current Xero options," says Sandra.

A resource that Kaimai parishes have found beneficial is having a local accountant to assist treasurers. "Presbytery appointed Martyn Vincent to assist their parishes throughout the consolidation. He is an asset that treasurers can call on as needed but, most importantly, he is someone who understands their local context."

Glen Williams hopes that Presbyterian churches will utilise the opportunities that financial consolidation provides them. "No one likes change but this one is necessary and will be beneficial. There will be less compliance work for parishes and their treasurers, no individual annual returns, completion of compliant year-end accounts no longer required at a parish or presbytery level. This should free up time and financial resource that parishes can redirect into their mission work."

Stewardship of parish financial resources is completely unaffected by the consolidation process, says Sandra.

How financial consolidation will affect UCANZ churches was clarified after consultation with Church auditors. "The Presbyterian share of UCANZ churches will be recorded in our accounts. We will need UCANZ churches' financial trial balances the same as we do for Presbyterian churches," explains Sandra.

With the financial consolidation of Kaimai and Te Aka Puaho accounts well underway, Sandra and Glen are beginning the consolidation process with all other presbyteries. A survey was sent to treasurers in October asking for general information about how each parish runs and for any concerns treasurers may have around consolidation. This feedback will be used to inform the consolidation roadshows that Sandra and Glen will run from late October to early December with Northern, Central, Alpine and Southern presbyteries.

"We are really pleased that presbyteries are generously hosting these roadshows allowing us to meet with treasurers in person. At these presentations we will cover what consolidation will mean for parishes, what we will and won't need from treasurers and parish finance people, and how we can work together to make this change as stress-free as possible. There will also be time to answer questions and address any concerns," says Sandra.

See the Church website for more information on the Church's financial consolidation, <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/treasurers-information-church-management-support-guide/financial-consolidation>.

Angela Singer **Spanz**



CHURCHES HELP CHILDREN OF MARTON



Around 80 children attended the free Christian holiday club in Marton.

Two churches, separated by 160km, joined together in mission to serve the small Rangitikei town of Marton.

In October, St John's in the City, Wellington took a team of 36 to join 15 people from St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Marton, where the 50-strong team – most of whom were teens – served the community in a variety of ways.

The major project was running a week-long Christian holiday club, which was the long-held vision of St Andrew's minister, Rev Philip Warner.

Presbyterian Youth Ministry National Manager, Gordon Fitch connected the two parishes, recognising that St Andrew's vision for a youth holiday programme could be supported by experience within the St John's team.

Jasmin Vanderwaff, St Andrew's youth pastor, co-ordinated the service projects, including the holiday programme which was attended by around 80 children. Activities included singing, Bible stories, games, music, sports, crafts and a lot of fun, with the teenagers acting as positive role models and guides for the youngsters, explains Gordon.

Parents were full of appreciation for the free holiday programme, and Facebook lit up with comments from happy caregivers.

"All three of my grandkids had so much fun. Every day when I picked them up, they sang the songs they learnt. Such a fantastic thing to put on for the kids. Well done team," said one.

"Nga mihi nui ki a koutou! Such happy, positive role-models for our tamariki! So, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. My boys are currently singing 'light house' lol [sic]. Fingers crossed that you guys make it back to little old Marton next year. Mauri ora," said another.

For 15-year-old Baeleigh Fitch from St John's in the City, one of the big highlights was watching young people grow in their faith.

"I really wanted to help kids on their faith journey," she said. "When I was younger I went to programmes like this and it helped me know God better. I wanted to do the same for others."

Seeing children grow in their faith was also a highlight for Evelyn Barber, 16, from St John's in the City. Evelyn was also interested in working alongside another youth group, and enjoyed the experience so much, that she is keen to come back again next year – and bring friends.

"By the end of the week, we were all singing together. I didn't want to leave," she said.

The morning holiday programme was followed by other service projects in the afternoon including a drive for a local foodbank: the team, kitted out in white Marton Mission t-shirts, went door-to-door to every home in Marton collecting food for the Christian Welfare foodbank.

One evening, in conjunction with the local district council, the volunteers ran a youth event – Floatchella - for teens at the local swimming pool.

Add to this many hours of volunteer labour for local organisations and residents, including singing at a rest home, working at the church op-shop, painting the fence of an elderly Marton resident, cleaning preschool toys, and being involved in the skateboard mission at the local skate park. No wonder Marton's 5,000 residents all seemed to know that the volunteers were in town.

"People grow in faith by joining God in mission rather than hearing about it," is how Gordon described the motivation behind the project,

St John's in the City minister, Rev Stuart Simpson, sees opportunities for more partnerships between churches to share resources and expertise.

"Churches can struggle believing that they can't do anything, but they may just need help in one area," says Stuart. "This was St Andrew's project, and we were excited to work alongside St Andrew's by providing some practical assistance.

"Seeing our young people grow in their faith by serving others was a real highlight for me," he says.

"People are always looking for opportunities to live out their faith. This was a great opportunity for our young people to share their gifts, and see that their gifts are valuable and to appreciate that they are valued members of our faith community. You can't help but grow in faith as you witness God at work."

Jose Reader Spanz

New executive officer for Church Property Trustees



Russell Garrett has been appointed the Church Property Trustees new executive officer.

In July, Russell Garrett, a trustee of the Church Property Trustees for the past seven years, was appointed as the Trustees' new executive officer.

"The challenge, and what I am signing on for, is to help the Presbyterian Church use its resources to engage in mission," says Russell, who was looking for his next career move when then executive officer Kos van Lier announced his retirement from the role.

For Russell, the new job brings together his faith and a career in corporate finance.

"There is an element of wanting to give back, participate, and contribute to something that has meaning and a personal connection."

Russell has a long relationship with the Church having served in national roles and with his local parish.

"My parents, Margaret and Ian, still worship at St John's in the City, Wellington. My father was a youth leader and I was involved in the youth movement. My first job was in the national office of the Presbyterian Church. I had trained as an accountant. After university I could join one of the big eight accounting firms or take a short-term role with the Church in the National Youth office.

"They had a spare car and a bit of cash. I became a field worker, driving around the country meeting youth leaders and young people. I did that for three years. Then I did my OE in the United Kingdom. When I came back, in the mid-1990s, I was already into investments."

At about this time Russell began worshipping at St Ninian's Uniting Parish in Karori. He has chaired the St Ninian's parish council, and is currently parish representative and a member of the lay worship team.

The Church Property Trustees have custodial responsibility for many of the Presbyterian Church's assets. They also manage the major funds of the Church, including the Presbyterian Investment Fund and the ministers' Beneficiary Fund, and oversee a variety of trusts, including two farms.

Russell became a trustee of the Church Property Trustees in 2012. "The Trustees are always looking for people who can add diversity, depth and expertise. I had had 25 years in the world of investments so I was approached to be an associate on the investment committee and then a trustee."

He sees the Trustees as walking a tightrope between the past, the present and the future – but always with the mission of the Church front of mind.

"The Presbyterian Church is, to some extent, 'asset rich and cash poor'. The Trustees have a role in acting as stewards for the assets that have been inherited. The upside is that we have these assets. The down side is that the structures and infrastructure that created them can capture and constrain us.

"A big part of the Church's asset base is our land and buildings. The Church continues to face challenges around what to do with old buildings that are

earthquake prone or in the wrong place. How do we adapt to the changes that are happening? Our goal is making sure we have the right resources doing the right mission in the right places."

"In 30 years, it will be of no use pointing to the assets we have safeguarded for the future if there is no one there to engage in mission. Part of the reason I signed on for this role is that the Trustees are keen to work alongside others in the Church to find the best ways of both using the assets and to act as stewards for them."

Another challenge is coming to grips with new legislation as a new Trust Act will come into operation in 2021. "From a governance perspective, the bar continues to rise. We have moral imperatives, but also legal liabilities we cannot ignore."

The departure of former executive officer Kos van Lier coincides with the retirement of Trustees administrative secretary Pat Griffin. "It's a time of change in the Trustees' office. John White is joining me as a newcomer. We're inheriting a great set-up, but we'll also be looking at how we can use technology to be more efficient and sustainable," says Russell.

He is excited to be back working for the Church after decades in corporate life. "It is energising to be doing something new. But I am also reconnecting with people I worked with 30 years ago. People who were just starting out in ministry then are ringing up now to talk about their retirement plans."

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)

Church Schools appoints minister as new director

Rev Stephanie Wells is the new Director of the Presbyterian Church Schools Research Office.

Both a Presbyterian Church minister and a trained teacher, she also saw her own daughters off to boarding school when she was a farmer, who was also working part-time. She has had a number of rural parishes since then. "I understand the culture shock of going from a small school to a city, and I am interested in the intersection between church and school. I love networking and connecting people up. So, I looked at the advertisement and I thought, 'That's me!'"

She looked at the requirements for her new role, and found she could tick all the boxes of the stated requirements.

Stephanie takes over from Rev Sharon Ross Ensor and she has been impressed by her approach. "Sharon was very good at networking, and I am following her lead. If one school is doing an excellent job in one area, I want others to be able to pick up information about it easily and make use of it. It's great if they can talk to each other." She plans to develop an on-line forum for staff members.

"I also want to liaise well with the church community so that people know what the Church schools are doing. Stories in SPANZ are very helpful in providing an insight into what is happening in various schools." She is very clear on what she will not be doing in the role: "I am not going to have people ring up asking for a good book on Jesus, and post it to them!"

Good resources on the Church Schools website are key, she says. She points to the series of videos Sharon developed with Rev Chris Nicol on the history of the Presbyterian Church schools and what it means to be a Presbyterian.

"Sharon also developed a teaching resource with Rev Phil King for schools working with Global Mission so that when students go to other countries, they have a sense of why they are there and how to work with local people. And when mindfulness and well-being became an element of teaching in schools, she made a website called 'Christian Contemplation Curriculum' so that there would be a Presbyterian Church resource so our teachers did not have to use a generic one. This strengthens our approach as Presbyterians."

Stephanie is excited about the Government's introduction of compulsory New Zealand history teaching in schools from 2022. She looks forward to being able to make use of the Presbyterian Resource Centre in Dunedin and other resources to find aspects of special interest to students.

The first months in the new role have seen Stephanie visiting the schools up and down the country. These range from those with several thousand pupils to those with about a hundred. "They all have their own history and traditions. Solway College,



Rev Stephanie Wells, Director of the Presbyterian Church Schools Research Office is also minister at Kaiapoi Cooperating Church in Canterbury.

in Masterton, for example, has a horse academy and Tinks Pottinger is the girls' riding guru."

Stephanie's new role is part-time and she remains the minister at Kaiapoi Cooperating Church in Canterbury.

She describes herself as 'a mid-life crisis minister'. Having marital issues, she and her husband went back to church. "He had a call to ministry. I went to the back of the farm and literally screamed. The prospect of being a minister's wife did not thrill me! But then we both went to Bible College.

"I'd say I had a 'niggle' rather than a calling. I thought to myself, 'I need to take the first step, and wait for a door to slam'. But none did and I kept going. I left my husband in the middle of studying. I went to the Presbyterian National Assessment in tears because of the separation, but I got in."

After two years of ministry training in Dunedin, her first parish was in the Maniototo, Central Otago.

Since the 2010-11 Canterbury earthquakes, she has worked around Canterbury at various churches. She believes that a history of experience in fronting issues, whether in one's personal and family life or professionally, is useful. "I have got scars and I have found in ministry that they are really helpful because people realise you are human," says Stephanie.

Jane Tolerton [SPANZ](#)

CHURCH SERVES HELPING OF HOSPITALITY



Ski workers from around the world, and the local region, line up to be served free hot dinners at the Wanaka Presbyterian Church. Rev Ian Hyslop describes the free meals as “an expression of God’s grace to others in our community – a community where the cost of living is very expensive”.

Biblical references to blessings that flow from the sharing of food are numerous. The concept has been given practical kiwi expression through an initiative launched by the Wanaka Presbyterian Church in 2016 and is still going strong today.

By all accounts, 2016 was a particularly lean year in terms of snow. A lack of good powder meant ski workers – local and foreign nationals alike – faced unusually hard times, so Wanaka Presbyterian Church member Ryan Lobb stepped up with an offer of free dinners.

Ryan had experience in the ski industry. He knew all too well how great a curse a low-snow season could be for the workers; their need struck a sympathetic chord with him.

“We felt we could help them at a difficult time,” he explained when the initiative launched. “Part of the motivation is to say thank you to the ski workers, as we really appreciate their contribution to the community. Without them, we would not be able to play the way we do in this place, and we think a free meal is a nice model of God’s grace, which itself is free.”

Four years and many hot dinners later, Ryan increasingly believes that the initiative “fits the eldership’s mission of reaching young people and being more community-focused,” particularly as fluctuating snow patterns continue to bring seasonal uncertainty.

Wanaka caters to three of the country’s top ski fields – Cardrona Alpine Resort, Treble Cone and Snow Farm NZ – and workers come from as far afield as the United Kingdom, Europe, North and South America and Canada.

The ski workers’ dinners are held at Wanaka Presbyterian’s Tenby St community centre every second Tuesday over a period of 12 weeks, generally from June to September. On any given evening, up to 90 diners reflecting some 20 different nationalities turn up to partake of an equally varied two-course menu – typical meals are ham on the bone, macaroni cheese, chicken dishes, shepherd’s pie, casseroles, stews and vegetables, brownies and fruit salad, apple shortcake and sticky date pudding.

Most of the food is purchased by the church, with the rest donated by local supermarkets, other outlets and regular markets. Some supermarkets support the effort by giving generous discounts on purchases made for the dinners.

Teams made up of around 30 volunteers pull each ski workers’ dinner together. Three cooking teams headed by Rena Cowie, Jacinta Hyslop and Judy Reid, rotate throughout the season to plan the menu, purchase and prepare the food.

Rena says some of the volunteers show up for duty every year without fail. “Others come forward when the dinners are promoted during Sunday services, while still others turn up on the night. We have people who just turn up and wash dishes for an hour!”

The main course is generally prepared on site, with dessert usually done by volunteers in their own home, often made ahead of time and frozen.

Rena finds the entire experience uplifting. “I am overwhelmed with people’s generosity of time, energy and foodstuffs,” she says. “Sometimes the number of diners we expect is larger than the number who arrive. But that’s not a problem, they all go home with ‘doggie bags’ for the next night’s tea.”

Each dinner is a ticketed event and is capped at 100. Tickets are distributed through skifield administrative offices.

The meals have been so well received over the time they’ve been offered, that some volunteers continue their involvement year after year, says Ryan, while the ski workers themselves are fulsome in their praise.

“Surprise, and gratitude ... they’re the two most common responses,” he says.

Wanaka Presbyterian falls under the banner of the Upper Clutha Presbyterian Church, headed by minister Rev Ian Hyslop. He describes the provision of free meals as “an expression of God’s grace to others in our community – a community where the cost of living is very expensive”.

“Our church mission is following Jesus’ great command ‘loving God-loving people’, and as folk in the church serve and give and cook and pray, we see this as a natural overflow of God’s love to others.

“As a church, we also support a community initiative through a local provider, Community Networks, who distribute food parcels to those in need in our Upper Clutha communities.”

Viv Posselt **Spanz**

EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE OF PALESTINE

Karo Wilson's recent visit to the Holy Land has imbued her with a deeper understanding of the importance of advocacy in the role of mission.

After visiting Palestine through a Council of World Mission (CWM) exchange programme, she arrived back in New Zealand with a new determination to speak out on the injustices she had witnessed.

The experience impacted her deeply.

"I may not be able to solve the crisis faced by Palestinians, or bring peace to the area, but I can share the stories of injustice, oppression and discrimination that I saw and heard. Perhaps it will encourage others to look further into ways that they can have an impact for those in this world who live on the margins," says Karo.

The part-study, part-sightseeing tour was organised as a CWM Face-to-Face programme, which offers theological students an opportunity to participate in a cross-cultural ministry experience outside their familiar context.

Karo, who is children and youth pastor at Oamaru's Waiareka-Weston Presbyterian Church, completed her theology degree in July, and will graduate in December. An essay she wrote on faith in the context of empire, accompanied her application to participate in the Face-to-Face programme.

The Church's Global Mission Co-ordinator, Rev Phil King, says the value of the Face-to-Face programmes reaches well beyond the benefit to any individual student.

"The Palestinian programme is just one of many that CWM offers. They can help students gain a greater understanding of the diverse world we live in and hopefully challenge them to think more broadly about their future ministry," he says.

"In programmes like this, the primary benefit is undoubtedly for the individual concerned. In Karo's case, it is a wonderful gift to be given the chance to travel to Palestine and share in an organised programme with students from around the world, all experiencing the history and culture and complexity of the Holy Land for the first time.

"It will be life-changing for her; so first and foremost it is a gift to her personally," Phil adds. "But as a Church, we hope she can use that gift to share her insights and learning with others and help broaden their understanding about the Middle Eastern context. We hope it will add colour and content to her preaching, when leading Bible studies, and in conversations about the Middle East, which can often be controversial."



Karo Wilson, pictured in Bethany, during her CWM visit to the Holy Land. She was deeply affected by stories of injustice, oppression and discrimination in Palestine.

Students on the 10 August to 10 September visit to Palestine were based in Bethlehem and hosted by Dar al Kalima University. They visited sites of biblical significance and attended lectures covering Palestinian history, faith in the context of occupation, Palestinian film, and women in Palestine. Various non-profit organisations spoke to the students about the work they are doing to advocate for Palestinians.

Karo says the programme centred around hearing the stories and experiences of individuals and gaining a first-hand experience of life in Palestine.

"While it was confronting, and at times extremely upsetting to see what life is like for Palestinians living under occupation, it was necessary to experience that to fully understand the situation. It definitely opened my eyes. It made me realise that sometimes there is a disconnect between what we think we know and reality.

"One of the biggest things I brought back with me is to not always believe what you read in mainstream media. The situation for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation is dire... there are huge injustices being played out every day. Yet because Israel is monopolising the narrative, many people have no idea what is going on."

Since coming home, Karo has addressed the topic in her preaching and has started on a series of speaking engagements with church and community-based groups.

"Sometimes we get so focused on mission being to bring people to God," she says. "However, mission also calls for us to be advocates for those who have no voice of their own. The Bible demands a care and concern for those who are marginalised, oppressed and discriminated against. To be Jesus-like, we too must be prepared to speak out against powers that aim to treat others in this way."

Viv Posselt Spanz



PARTNER CHURCHES BUILD CONNECTIONS IN NZ

Two recent programmes saw strands of faith extend between New Zealand, Vanuatu and Taiwan as part of the Church's ongoing commitment to building awareness and understanding with its partner churches in other countries.

The first involved 10 young people – five each from Taiwan and Vanuatu – who attended a youth exchange programme in July that ended with them joining the Presbyterian Youth Ministry (PYM) national youth leaders' conference, Connect, at Te Maungarongo – Ohope Marae.

The second initiative brought two Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV) chaplains – Carl Nial and Kevin Dalesa – to New Zealand in August to attend the annual conference of the New Zealand Association of Religious Education Teachers and School Chaplains, and the Presbyterian Church Schools' Conference.

Both exchanges fit well into the Presbyterian Church's overall mission programme, says Rev Phil King, PCANZ Global Mission Co-ordinator.

"It's important to build awareness and understanding of our partner churches' cultures and contexts and to help build their capacity through supporting the training and educational development of their leaders," he says.

Enriching for hosts and visitors

"As a host church, we are enriched through offering hospitality, cultural exposure to New Zealand, and providing training opportunities for our partners. For both parties at an institutional level, the relationship is strengthened and deepened. On a personal level, important friendships are formed, and individuals are encouraged in their faith and equipped with new tools to support them in their leadership and ministry."

The visit to New Zealand by PCV chaplains was a first. Phil says it came about through an invitation from church schools during the planning stages of the conference.

"They asked me if we would like to include any chaplains from church schools in Vanuatu," he explains. "This was a generous offer from which I could immediately see benefits, so I jumped at it. After contacting the PCV schools' office, we managed to facilitate the visits of Kevin and Carl to both the church schools conference and the Presbyterian Church Schools Conference which followed immediately afterwards."

Rev Reuben Hardie, St Kentigern's Boys' and Girls' schools chaplain and a Presbyterian minister, hosted the Vanuatu chaplains. He accommodated the visitors in his home for a week and provided transport.

A grateful Phil says: "His buy-in to the whole thing made it so much easier to manage. Reuben is actively involved in arranging school visits to Vanuatu, so he has a high level of engagement in the partnership."

Kevin is the chaplain at Seaside School in Port Vila. Speaking recently via Reuben he described the chaplains' conference as "very interesting".

"It was a first time for me to attend a conference like this one, and I thought it gave me a new start on enhancing my teaching lessons by using parable illustration, and also the internet," he wrote. "I also like how I could have students run service-learning programmes to make them experience what they can do to support people in need."

Such positive feedback came as no surprise to Reuben, who says both Ni-Van chaplains appeared to have had a great week.

"There was a lot for them to take in... two conferences on the trot," he says. "I remember them saying they particularly enjoyed the talks given by Brother Damien Price from Australia on transformative service, and the talk given by Rev Hamish Galloway [on the relationship between the schools and the wider Presbyterian Church]. As always with these programmes, it is really in the weeks following that you start to reflect on what you heard. They seemed to value the opportunity to rub shoulders with other chaplains, but they also talked about the difference in the context that they are working in."

Outside conference matters, Reuben said both Kevin and Carl had found New Zealand "freezing cold", but readily mucked in when needed and engaged well with everyone they met.

"It was clear that they both had a deep faith and were passionate about the opportunity they had in their respective schools to bring the Gospel to children. They were keen to find new ways to engage with their own students."

Relationships deepened

A month earlier, five students from Taiwan and five from Vanuatu, were here on another first: they took part in a two-week Youth Leadership Exposure Programme in July, and then went on to the PYM youth leaders' conference at Ohope Marae.

Phil says it was the first time they had brought two groups from different countries together for the one event. "We had previously brought Vanuatu youth to other youth programmes, but this was a new twist on that... it came out of an existing relationship and a desire to deepen it."

The initiative had its roots in an earlier idea mooted by the late Alma Wensi, a youth leader based at the PCV's Centenary Presbyterian Church in Santo. His interest had been piqued after reading about Global Mission and Connect on the Church website.

"Alma reached out to me asking whether some of the Vanuatu youth could come to Connect. I thought this was a great idea, and we slowly worked towards it," says Phil. "I found donors who were willing to help fund the costs, and so we put plans in place for them to come in July 2020. Then late last year I visited Taiwan, hoping to reinstate shared youth exchange programmes with the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.

"After meeting with them, we agreed to make plans for this year, and I suggested we arrange a joint programme with Vanuatu and Taiwan. Our intention to hold Connect at the Church's national marae made it all the more meaningful," Phil says. "But sadly, Alma died quite suddenly from an infection just a few weeks before the programme took place. It was very poignant having one of the youths from his church present with us."

Phil says the Taiwanese group funded their own international travel, with all other costs being met by donations and Global Mission funds.

Kiwi congregations great hosts

He approached two Kiwi Presbyterian congregations to help with the two-week programme leading up to Connect. The plan saw all 10 visitors spend an initial few days together in Auckland, hosted by St Heliers Presbyterian Church. The Taiwan group then remained in Auckland, still under St Heliers' wing, while the Vanuatu group travelled to Gisborne, where they were hosted by the Mangapapa Union Church. Both groups met up again at Connect.



Kevin Dalesa, left, is a Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV) chaplain at Seaside School in Port Vila, Vanuatu. He is pictured with Rev Reuben Hardie, St Kentigern's Boys' and Girls' schools chaplain.

Mangapapa's minister Rev Paula Levy had a sound knowledge of Ni-Van language and customs, having lived in Vanuatu with her family for several years. After being welcomed to Gisborne with a voyage on Tairawhiti's waka hourua (voyaging canoe), the visitors helped with the church's preparations for their mid-winter Christmas dinner. In the lead-up to that event, they helped door-knock to extend the invitation to as many members of the local community as possible.

"It was a wonderful experience for my church to host them here," Paula says, "both in terms of what they contributed and what we learned from them. We loved it and wouldn't hesitate to do it again."

Ming Xie, a Taiwanese youth leader at St Heliers, and Hannah North, helped formulate the Auckland programme, initially for both groups and then for the Taiwanese group. After a period of orientation, during which all 10 visitors learned about New Zealand life and culture, they attended a two-day event called *Talk to Me*, aimed at encouraging

dialogue and understanding between people of different faiths and cultures.

Those who stayed in Auckland were swept up in the annual St Heliers *Ideas Explode* school holiday programmes, says Ming.

"Overall, it's been really successful," he says. "I think the overseas students experienced the love of God from a different context. My young people formed really strong relationships, and for the congregation, it provided us with an opportunity to practise the hospitality that the Bible teaches us to do."

Both Ming and Paula say they have received positive feedback from their students, much of which suggests the ripple effect is already being seen in their own churches.

Ming passed on some comments from the Taiwan group. One said it was one of the best trips of their life, another praised the opportunity to make "beautiful memories", while another spoke highly of the chance to build authentic relationships with Kiwis.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

RAINWATER TANK CAN SAVE LIVES: A GRANDMOTHER'S CHRISTMAS PRAYER

For this year's Christmas Appeal, Christian World Service invites your prayers and support for people in need of water. From farmers struggling to manage the effects of climate change, to the fisherpeople, who monitor coasts to provide scientists with information to back legal challenges to huge power plants. Poor people everywhere are standing together to demand the water that is essential to life. Something as simple as a rainwater tank can turn a family's fortune around, giving life where there was mainly misery.

At the end of the day, Farazia looks at her grandchildren with love. Her life in southern Uganda has been hard and she wants their lives to be easier. She looks at them and remembers her own children, lost to HIV and AIDS. She closes her eyes and prays for each one by name.

At almost 80 years old, she has three grandchildren and one great grandchild to care for. "Every day I ache," says grandmother Farazia. She works her small plot of land and prays they will have enough food, and be safe from harm. Her days are long even with family help.

Much of the day is spent collecting water. It takes the girls, Betty, Joan and Anna, two and a half hours to walk to the borehole or small stream each day. Twice a day, each fills a 20-litre jerry can with the mineralised and polluted water, which sometimes makes them ill.

Two years ago, they lost their only brother to cholera- picked up from the water. "Their schooling is hampered by fetching water, and by poverty," Farazia tells Charles Rwabambari of the Centre for Community Solidarity. Farazia buys



Farazia, who is 80 years old, is raising her three granddaughters. It takes the girls two and a half hours to walk to a water borehole. Twice a day, each fills a 20-litre jerry can with mineralised and polluted water, which sometimes makes them ill. The need a rainwater tank to collect clean water.

clay filters from the Centre for their drinking water.

The girls worry about the long walk and the many dangers they face. Five years ago, Betty, their oldest sister who was heavily pregnant, was attacked on the way home, later giving birth to Arinda. Betty now works in the local town, saving all the money she can to help her family.

Once a month, Farazia attends the association for caregivers of orphans and vulnerable children in her village. The group has been such a strength to her through difficult times. She has learnt about the virus that claimed her children, how to make charcoal, and learnt new ways to grow food with the changing climate. When she can, she adds a little money to her savings account – her goal is to raise \$366 for her half share of a new rainwater tank.

She has seen how much a tank lifts the fortunes of families like hers. With water on tap, she knows the children will be healthier and safer. They will have a much better chance of escaping the misery that has accompanied them in their early years.

Once a year, there is a lottery for two rainwater tanks allocated to one of the 25 village associations. Members choose a slip of paper, but so far, she has not been lucky. Maybe this year.

Farazia is not the only one without water. According to the United Nations,

one in three people do not have access to safe water. In this year's Christmas appeal, CWS invites you to focus deeply on the United Nations sixth Sustainable Development Goal, Clean Water and Sanitation, one of 17 agreed at forming a positive agenda for a better future.

Water is not a luxury but a necessity. Safe water, sanitation and good hygiene are the basics of life.

CWS partners are giving people access to safe water, assisting them to protect waterways, and helping them survive through changing weather patterns and disaster. Part of their communities, they are taking an integrated approach based on the stories and needs of the people. Climate change, natural compounding, and sometimes conflict, are disempowering the difficulties they face. Their vision is long term and with your help, they can reach more communities.

Please support the 2019 Christmas Appeal. Give water this Christmas.

Find out more by visiting <http://www.christmasappeal.org.nz/>

CWS has prepared stories and worship resources for your church. Posters, envelopes and service sheets are available from CWS: phone 0800 74 73 72 or email cws@cws.org.nz

John 1:4 "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

– CWS



Her
need is
CLEAR.

Give **WATER** for Christmas,
the essence of survival

donate now
christmasappeal.org.nz





REV. DENNIS MOORE
1930–1999

Dennis Moore passed away nearly 20 years ago. This year, he is helping put six young people through tertiary education.

Thanks to Dennis's deep commitment to young people in need and his gift to Presbyterian Support, his memory and generosity will live on forever.

Throughout his life, Dennis always sought opportunities to serve people in need in his community, particularly young people.



When he died in 1999, Dennis included Presbyterian Support in his Will. That caring bequest has created a permanent legacy. Each year, the Dennis Moore scholarship fund helps local youth further their education.



With a small amount of planning now, **you can have a big impact.**

Presbyterian Support staff members are happy to provide bequest language to include Presbyterian Support in your Will, or to talk with you or your financial manager about planned giving options.

To establish your legacy, please contact a staff member in your region:

NORTHERN: Suzanne Ward. suzanne.ward@psn.org.nz. (09) 520 8628

EAST COAST: Sylvie Gibbins. philanthropy@psec.org.nz. (06) 877 8193

CENTRAL (WELLINGTON TO TARANAKI): Jacqui Ritchie. jacqui.ritchie@psc.org.nz. (04) 439 4929

UPPER SOUTH ISLAND: Megan Waddington. meganw@psusi.org.nz. (03) 363 8209

SOUTH CANTERBURY: Christine Adamson. christine.adamson@pssc.co.nz. (03) 687 1122

OTAGO: Jude McCracken. judem@psotago.org.nz. (03) 477 7115

SOUTHLAND: Courtney Forde. courtney.forde@pss.org.nz. (03) 211 8200

Thankyou

www.ps.org.nz



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