



Spanz

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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Who's
leading
our
ceremonies?

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After the Christchurch terror attacks

In a time when there have been so many words it can be hard to know where to start, but there are some things we need to say and demonstrate without delay or equivocation. So I will start with these words shared from our Alpine Presbytery family to our Muslim communities in the aftermath of the shooting: we stand in common humanity with our Muslim family, friends and neighbours. This was evil and is a tragedy. We are so sorry this has happened. Our Muslim brothers and sisters, may God's unswerving love be your companion in grief, God's peace and hope the sources of our resolve to live into a new day. Thank you for the example of forgiveness you have lived out.

As we acknowledge the incredible goodness, bravery, and generosity of the people of New Zealand may we also confess that darkness is not an import. We are hearing what we perhaps secretly knew all along—that New Zealand has never been safe for everyone. Of course this kind of darkness which hates and seeks death and division is a kind we should all resist and seek to dispel. There is another kind of darkness Christchurch people know all too well which is trauma itself. It cannot so much be escaped, but needs be grieved, gently accompanied, listened to and healed over time. This has been compounded for many people here and has a major impact on our resilience.

Yet another form of night is more like our childhood bedroom with the door thrust shut and the light extinguished. Counterintuitively, this is also the place we sometimes need to stay in for a while, long enough for our eyes to become accustomed and our ears attuned—to notice what God might teach us in the

dark that we never would have perceived in the light. Just so, this terrible act of murder, aimed firmly at our Muslim communities, also requires Christians to respond and reflect. It is tempting to try and race through the shadows, or these days, flick the light switch, but some of us here have been wondering if we are not in fact being called to wait a while in the dark. I wonder if from the perspective of Christian faith we have been thrust prematurely into Maundy Thursday where we find the kind of darkness Lent beckons us toward. Here in the Easter shadows we are being challenged about our power. The resources for enacting a community which lays down its power, which loves without boundaries, that tells the truth about our darkness, that celebrates the beauty and diversity of human life are to be found in the life, death, resurrection, and ongoing ministry of Jesus who divested himself of all power and security coming to us in the midst of our brokenness. The God who appears in brokenness, not only heals it but participates in it, and calls us to follow.

How will change last and our aspirations be revisited and refreshed? As a friend reminded me the other day our determination to reach beyond our silos in relationship and listening must be accompanied by deeper discipleship and character. The Gospel claims there is one humanity in Christ which means laying down power amongst the privileged and listening to the margins, but it does so recognising that Jesus relativises the status, power and culture of all people. There are undoubtedly many questions and matters for the Church to determine, nevertheless, as Richard Beck in his book *Stranger God: Meeting Jesus in Disguise* makes the case, often times the



Rev Dr Andrew Nicol

biblical God's real test of goodness and wickedness is hospitality to strangers.¹

So rather than protecting real or perceived social space for the faith, we might find confidence and hope in the confession that the vulnerability and weakness of the cross is an act of divine wisdom that reshapes the fabric of the world. In the shadows of Maundy Thursday we meet Jesus stooped to wash the feet of his disciples. And here in the diminished light the disciple Peter gives voice to the scandal at the heart of reality. That to be a person of the Way is to be shaped by the character of the triune God of Israel's who takes the form of a slave by identifying with the oppressed and lowly of the world. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus upends notions of power and status in humble service and love. In so doing we confess the darkness is no impediment to God's presence. Let's not rush for the light switch. Can we wait in the dark a while?

– Rev Dr Andrew Nicol is minister at St Margaret's Presbyterian Church, Christchurch.

¹ Richard Beck, *Stranger God: Meeting Jesus in Disguise* (Fortress, 2017).

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MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

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

New Zealand, Our Home.

The land of the long white cloud, rich and fertile, deep in the south of the Pacific Ocean. You are the land of "milk and honey", viewed by many as the land of opportunity. Oh, how we love and adore you. You have a pull and an appeal that is irresistible. New Zealand, you are our home. Many of your children were born here, many were born overseas. When they came to you, they could not leave. You have embraced us all and given us security, peace and an opportunity to do well.

On Friday, 15 March, there was a nightmare in our land. The lives of 50 members of our Muslim family were taken, many more were injured and families were shattered forever. Christchurch was shaken to its core, and all New Zealand were shocked, shattered and shaken. We will grieve for years, broken and brought to our knees. A dark cloud hovered over our land. Not moving or dissipating – just hanging over us. Our grief and mourning reached to the sky. We turned to each other; we turned to the land, New Zealand our home. And we responded, reached out, cried and stood with each other. Especially with our Muslim family. We reconnected with our family. We remember what it is to be part of the human family in a deeper way. We need each other. We must make time with and for each other.

In New Zealand today, there are diversities galore in all areas of life: faith, ethnicity, religion, people, status, gender, age and more. We need to build relationships with each other for the sake of our unity and harmony in the land, and for future generations to have any chance of progress and a meaningful existence. There is unity in diversity, and it requires openness, communication, hopefulness, acceptance, tolerance and the desire to co-exist in the land.

In our Church, we have a statement: "We live in a bicultural journey, with a multicultural reality and a cross cultural emphasis". This sums up the state of our nation, I believe. Our journey forward requires us to be deliberate and intentional as people of this land. Together, we can make and mend differences. The future of New Zealand is in our hands. Each one of us must make a concerted decision to be participant in change, and to be involved in the



building up of this land and her people. Personally, I look in the mirror. And I know my heart, mind, attitude need to respond with a new mindset, a holistic attitude, and a heart for all people. Scripture teaches us that we are made in the image of our Creator. I will not judge and be condescending or be disrespecting to another, anymore.

In Christchurch recently, I met with ministers, chaplains from Christchurch hospitals and St Andrews College, and some church members. Our folks are in deep grief. They are stretched and drained. They have been shaken, and the anxiety and stress of the terrible events of 15 March are ongoing. Recovering patients remain in hospital at the time of writing; their families struggle; and there is visible police security at locations around the city. Tension and grief remains a daily reality for the victims, their families and the many folks supporting them.

Our Church family is praying for all these people, journeying with them, and keeping them in our thoughts.

The dark cloud is moving, but the sombre mood and gloom of death and destruction will simmer and remain. We are scarred for life. But we will go on. New Zealand is still paradise on earth, a land rich in kaimoana, majestic mountains, clean flowing rivers, pristine coastal shores and people with heart and soul, kindness and care, who value life. New Zealand will grow from this tragedy. New Zealand will rebuild physically, spiritually, and with humanity. New Zealand will stand as one people. Kia kaha, kia toa, ia Iehu Karaiti. We are people of the Pacific Ocean, we are people of the land, we are loved and blessed by our creator God: maker, redeemer and sustainer.

The clouds are moving. How truly inspiring the response to this tragedy has been from within New Zealand and from our global family. The light of our Lord Jesus shines on us all. Praise the Lord.

CHANGING ROLE OF CELEBRANTS

Presiding over significant life events like marriages and funerals was once the sole preserve of a religious minister. In New Zealand's secular society, that space is increasingly shared with independent celebrants.

New Zealand has almost 2,500 registered independent celebrants from all walks of life, offering their communities tailor-made ceremonies in vineyards, gardens and parks and stately homes. Weddings and civil unions are more likely to take place in these locales than in a church. Funerals are frequently held in undertaker chapels or there is no funeral held.

New Zealand is becoming an increasingly secular nation, and the Church is now at the edge rather than centre of our communities. Ministers of organised religion are no longer universally regarded as the go-to people for leading ceremonies that mark the important events in people's lives and are now one of many people that can lead such services.

Rev Peter Dunn began ministry in a rural Northland parish 30 years ago and was called to Invercargill a decade ago as the minister of the large suburban Windsor Community Church.

"When I started out, we did all the weddings and funerals. We would have conducted 30 to 40 funerals a year. Now, with two ministers, we do 20 funerals a year between us, mostly older church folk. We probably have about 25 per cent of the funerals and hardly any weddings – they've dried up. The long-term relationships are being lost. Over my 20 years in Northland I began to marry the children of the first generation of weddings, a wonderful experience."

Peter reflects that this change began in the mid-90s. A big factor in whether ministers are asked to do weddings is the church building itself, he says.

"In Northland the building was a historic one, which attracted people. Down here, the old-style church was pulled down in 2016. There's only been one wedding since we've been in the new church."

Rev Nathan Parry of Island Bay Presbyterian Church in Wellington agrees. Nathan has been a minister for 13 years. In the past five years he has not officiated at a wedding inside his church. "Weddings are all being held elsewhere now, and our church is tucked away. It's not a highly visible one."

By contrast, Rev Glynn Cardy's parish of St Luke's in Remuera has an historic church building that people still want to get married in.

"A lot of couples who opt for weddings in our church don't want to stress the God element but they do want their vows to take place in a sacred space where people have said those same words over time," he says. "Standing on a beach is nice but it's not the same."

Glynn thinks more people are opting out of church weddings because Christian churches are no longer seen as a symbol of belonging.

"In ancient times, the minister was for the whole village. Part of the tradition was about being there for everyone, but most churches now operate for their members or to attract them. The breakdown in the Church and society relationship over the 30 plus years I've been a minister has meant that here in Remuera people see the church as a club they don't belong to... I feel a bit sad about that."

St Luke's works hard to be accessible to the community. "Any celebrant or minister can take a service here," explains Glynn. "We're theologically liberal and although we can't conduct gay marriages, gay couples have had their relationship blessed here."

Leading funeral services is another area that has seen change in recent years.

While it has been common practice for ministers to take funeral services in undertaker chapels for many years, as more elderly people live and die in rest homes, Nathan says funeral services themselves are in decline.

"It's becoming more common for no funeral to be held, especially if relatives are based overseas," he explains. "People can be quite removed from death because they don't mix with the older age group. The Church is the one place where we do mix through the ages."

There are exceptions to this notable change. Rev Maua Sola has been minister of the Mangere Pacific Islanders Church for the past 27 years. In that time, he has rarely heard of any member of his congregation using an independent celebrant.

"Pacific islands communities are pretty conservative when it comes to these things," he reflects. "They would still opt for an ordained minister."

Maua reflects that for ministers to flourish in today's celebrancy role, they must meet people where they are.

"You can't use templates in these cultures. You can't find templates. You gotta write it up yourself."

Mangere is one of the biggest parishes in the Northern Presbytery, offering services in Niuean, Samoan and Cook Islands



Celebrant Jill Kayser, pictured left, says she works with couples getting married to help them identify who and what they want to honour in their ceremony and whether they want a spiritual component.

languages as well as English. In a year, Maua officiates at around 10 weddings and 20 funerals. He says that in order for the ceremony to be real and authentic for his congregation it has to be conducted in their own language.

"The second most commonly spoken language in Auckland is Samoan," he says. "Not many people know that. I don't let my own limitations [with languages] prevent me from catering for the expectations of people. In the past, ministers with island people in their parishes didn't make enough effort to cater for them in their own languages. It takes hard work to understand another culture, and get out of your comfort zone."

Rev Dr Tokerau Joseph trained in ministry in Dunedin before serving 13 years as minister at First Church in

Dunedin until 2017. He says the church is a diverse congregation and it's the immigrants who often seek to get married in the church.

"First Church had a high number of Japanese wanting celebrations. Some were legally married but wanted a Christian, western-style ceremony. I enjoyed doing a lot of weddings. There were even two from Venezuela," he reflects. "When people feel you're genuine and really trying to help them that sets a good platform for a long-term relationship. Some you may not see again but you never know what seeds you planted."

Rev Mo Morgan is the minister of St James Presbyterian Church in Whanganui. As someone who has come through ministry training recently, she says it's now a given

that the role of a minister as celebrant has changed.

"I went through KCML in 2015/16. They prepared us for different types of situations," she says. "We're a cross-cultural society. Every funeral is different."

When it comes to choosing between an independent celebrant or a minister, two factors come into play. One is the long-term pastoral relationship a minister can offer, as opposed to a professional service that ends after the ceremony. The other is the expression of faith.

Rev Peter Dunn says, "Now, when I'm invited to participate it's a Christian funeral, and the faith component is what stands out. There's a lot of hope and celebration. Non-church people comment that it's so different. People



"It's becoming more common for no funeral to be held, especially if relatives are based overseas," says the Rev Nathan Parry. "People can be quite removed from death because they don't mix with the older age group. The Church is the one place where we do mix through the ages."

often say to me, we don't want it to be religious but invariably there'll be a prayer or a Bible reading requested. I've never done a truly secular service."

Mo agrees that faith is integral to the offering.

"I can't stop being a minister in that role," says Mo, "But I'm sensitive to the language and imagery used. I gauge where people are at. Whether someone feels Christian or not, I'm still going to be pointing to the hope that Christ brings. We also provide a hospitable gathering space and time to reflect, confess and point to redemption."

Rev Glynn Cardy adds that ministers have a full-time role, rather than offering celebrancy as a "sideline activity", which most independent celebrants do. It is the depth of experience that counts, believes Glynn: "Ministers take liturgy every week so they have a sense of how it flows. In designing a wedding the interplay between formal and informal is strong."

Families often don't know what to do when a loved one dies, says Rev Nathan Parry. A minister can offer pastoral care and is often asked by family members to accompany them into the rest home to see the deceased.

With weddings the minister will tailor a service that's based on asking the couple searching questions beforehand. "I ask them why they're taking the step of getting married, to get them to articulate their understandings. There's a more formal aspect to having a minister involved."

Fewer ceremonies overall means a greater focus can be given to each one. A funeral can take two to three days of a minister's time, says Peter. "They're time consuming, and I remember having two or three funerals sometimes in a fortnight."

In the early 2000s, the Presbyterian Church commissioned a research study by AC Nielson called *Attracting New Zealanders to Spiritual Life*. The study noted that ceremonies traditionally associated with key life stages can also open people up to the possibility of church assuming some relevance in their life, and encourage them to take a step closer. The report encouraged establishment of community celebrants in congregations who could act as a bridge, conducting non-Christian weddings in the church and offering blessings and other special ceremonies.

Former Kids Friendly coach, Jill Kayser is an elder of St Helier's Presbyterian Church congregation in Auckland, and a (Methodist) church appointed

celebrant. "I suspect that particular pilot [community celebrant] didn't succeed, because it wasn't effectively implemented," says Jill, "but I think the idea has merit as an outreach service. It was maybe a little ahead of its time."

Community celebrants, she says, although connected to the church, could appeal to those who don't want an orthodox Christian ceremony.

"The celebrant could become the connection back to faith for people who increasingly aren't drawn to the institutional side of religion, or can't find a place of worship that works for them," she reflects.

"I have a yearning to serve people in the community. I work with couples getting married to help them identify who and what they want to honour in their ceremony and whether they want a spiritual component and what that could look like."

The biggest change that independent celebrants have helped to bring about over the past 20 years, she says, is by offering a personalised service that responds to an increasingly diverse and multicultural society, as well as a secular one.

"The question is, how do we serve people?"

Jade Reidy [Spanz](#)

Award for Deaconess Collection

Handwritten memoirs, bonnets and badges are all part of an extraordinary archive of material documenting the service of 175 Presbyterian women in New Zealand from 1901 to 1975.



The archive, known as the Presbyterian Church Deaconess Collection, has had its true value internationally recognised through the conferment last November of a UNESCO Memory of the World New Zealand award.

There are 35 collections listed on the UNESCO Memory of the World NZ Register – eight new ones in 2018, including the Deaconess Collection. The Presbyterian Research Centre had one other collection listed in 2017, the Ng New Zealand Chinese Heritage Collection.

“The Deaconess Collection,” says Presbyterian Research Centre Director Jane Thomsen, “shines a light on a group of New Zealand women, who over 75 years served many of New Zealand’s poor and vulnerable, yet whose stories are largely untold. We are delighted by UNESCO’s recognition of the Collection because it will provide a springboard for the stories of these pioneering women in ministry to be heard.”

Deaconesses were an order for women in the Presbyterian Church when the conventions of the day denied them ordination, despite their training being almost identical to ministry training.

The Deaconess Order was founded in New Zealand by Rev Rutherford Waddell soon after the turn of the century, essentially to enlist aid for his parish work. Courses were established to train women in social and missionary service, teaching and nursing, and by the mid-1900s, were extended to include theological training.

The women recognised through the UNESCO award served their church and communities in ways that have had lasting significance.

One of the first was Sister Mary McQueen, deaconess at Knox Church in 1906. While

Delighted by UNESCO’s recognition of the Presbyterian Church Deaconess Collection are Presbyterian Research Centre director Jane Thomsen, right, with the centre’s archivist Rachel Hurd.

working with Sister Evelyn Macadam from First Church, she noticed the plight of children in their local Dunedin community. The women decided to take the youngsters into their home, an action which led to the founding of the first PSSA (Presbyterian Social Service Association, later known as Presbyterian Support) Children’s Home in North Dunedin, with Sister Mary McQueen becoming its matron.

Another was Margaret Reid Martin. After training and serving as a deaconess, she was the first woman to be ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in 1965. Twenty-two years later she became the second woman appointed Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, all the while advancing her stated mission of ensuring women’s perspectives “influenced both the style and direction of decision-making” in the Church.

Jane describes the order as an “example of the growth of active women’s leadership funded by women during the 20th century”. It was a movement that responded to social pressures caused by events including the Depression, both world wars, and the inter-war and post-war periods, she says.

“Through their work, the deaconesses made significant contributions to education and social services throughout New Zealand, from Tūhoe in the Uruwera to underprivileged communities in Dunedin.”

Jane nominated the Deaconess Collection for the UNESCO award. She said the idea to highlight women in the Church’s history came out of research being

done on women’s leadership within the Church, combined with the 2018 interest in the suffrage movement. The award was officially presented at the National Library in Wellington on 26 November, 2018.

“The Deaconess order was a way of making women’s work visible within society and gave women a voice and a formal role outside the home,” Jane explains. “It paved the way for the ordination of women, which finally happened in 1965. The Presbyterian Church was one of the first Christian denominations in New Zealand to formally give women office as elders and ordained ministers.”

The Deaconess Collection includes extensive correspondence and documentation, a personal diary, handwritten memoirs, 60 audiotapes of oral histories, 10 photo albums, 103 slides, cards outlining the career of each deaconess, the Roll of Deaconesses from 1901 to 1964, and artefacts that include 12 deaconess badges, two bonnets and a medal. Much of the collection, which is housed at Dunedin’s Presbyterian Research Centre Archives, was sourced through church organisations and family records.

“Because the Church was at the centre of everyday life in the early 20th century, this collection is a rich and unique source of information about the rise of social services, gender inequality and the role of women outside the home in the 1900s,” says Jane.

Viv Posselt Spanz



CHURCH SCHOOLS LEAD THE WAY CARING FOR CREATION

Presbyterian schools around the country are responding in kind to a 2018 commitment made by the Presbyterian Church to play a more expansive and influential role in caring for the environment.

A stated commitment to acknowledging the Church's Christian-centred role in caring for creation, while also taking steps to reduce its own impact on the environment was an important outcome of last year's General Assembly.

It came from a proposal submitted on behalf of Presbytery Central by young Presbyterian leaders Brett Reid and Nadia Ridsdale, and resulted in Assembly asking all church councils, church schools and social service agencies connected with the Church to implement three "achievable and measurable" acts of waste reduction and recycling.

With that came a call for progress towards the implementation of those actions to be reported to presbytery in congregations' annual reports. While the measures are not compulsory, they are considered desirable and drew widespread support from those in attendance.

The three actions centre on eliminating the use of single-use plastic items, making clearly labelled recycling bins more readily available, and adopting the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products.

A further recommendation to expand the list of environmental changes was

also agreed by Assembly, including a commitment to fair trade purchases; composting; exploring sustainable alternatives to hand towels in churches, schools and other agencies; and exploring sources of renewable energy.

What Brett called "friendly amendments" were added during Assembly discussions, aimed at encouraging the reduction of transport-related atmospheric degradation by promoting cycling through the provision of more cycle stands, and making church land available for community gardens or restoration plantings.

Brett, 27, is a theology student and youth pastor of a cross-parish youth ministry which operates across Khandallah Presbyterian, Ngaio Union, and Wadestown Presbyterian churches in Wellington. The proposal came out of a conversation he held with Nadia on how best to inspire people to adopt more environmentally beneficial practices.

"To be honest, we were fed up with the waste we saw on a Sunday morning, and we wanted the national Church to be aware that this was not responsible stewardship," he says. "We believe that responsible environmental stewardship is part of our calling as Christians, as is outlined in Scripture. As such, we understand our role on this earth as kaitiaki, or protectors of the land, and that includes our attitudes towards waste reduction and management."

Brett says it's time for the Church to express its mission of care for creation, explaining that the changes proposed were "small and simple".

"We were clear from the start that this was a national Church issue, and not one that could simply be addressed at a local presbytery level. Together we can make a difference. We hope our changes will have a ripple effect and influence individuals and others in our community."

Nadia said the pair had engaged with Ecostore, a company that manufactures and markets a range of "live clean" products; they had expressed a willingness to offer parishes special rates to purchase environmentally sustainable alternatives.

Like many schools around the country, most Presbyterian schools have had their collective eye on environmental issues for a while; the commitment made at Assembly gives them a leg-up to take it further.

Former Presbyterian Church Schools' Resource Office director Rev Sharon Ross Ensor says that while schools within the Presbyterian network operate quite independently from each other, many of them are already actively engaged in environmental care work.

She adds, "The Church could learn something from the things they are already doing. For example, there could be a mutuality in sharing ideas and stories."



Photo: iStock/harjigit

Head of Sustainability at Rangi Ruru Girls' School, Rosetta Brown, has been recognised for her work leading the school's reuse depot.

General Assembly asked parishes and Church schools to implement "achievable and measurable" acts of waste reduction and recycling.

Christchurch's Rangi Ruru Girls' School has several success stories to share. They adopted a comprehensive sustainability philosophy five years ago, putting in place a swathe of staff and Board-supported projects around environmental issues and waste reduction.

Kate Rivers, who leads the school's sustainability programme, says Rangi Ruru encourages their 640 plus students from Years 7-13 to become deep thinkers with the capacity to respond to the challenges of ecologically sustainable societies, and the girls are keenly aware of that responsibility.

"We need people across all disciplines who are literate in sustainability principles, who can think critically and laterally, who can work co-operatively, who can think in terms of connections, and who are prepared to participate and make a difference," she says. "Our girls are currently mentoring other local secondary schools to help their students establish policies and lead change."

Some examples of their proactive steps come from students Amy Huang, Hannah Macfarlane, Zoe Yates and Rosetta Brown.

Amy's "Mosaic Reuse Project" takes unsold materials from Salvation Army Family Stores and, with the help of volunteers, turns them into reusable bags for the store to use in-house for their customers. The idea stemmed from her dad's ripped pyjama top and learning-to-sew lessons at schools – Amy's "eureka" moment was realising she could be the person behind making something useful out of the fabric from discarded items.

"We called it Mosaic Reuse Project to help everyone think about what they can do to upcycle and use pieces of broken things to create beauty," she says. "We're continuing to develop the project every day."

Hannah and Zoe called their project "Suck It Up", the perfect moniker for something aimed at ridding the environment of plastic straws. Under the mantle of Young Enterprise, mentored by school staffer Jacqui Griffith, they were keen to highlight an issue of growing concern and came up with a metal straws solution.

"They're reusable, they don't have chemicals in them and they're better for the environment," the girls have been reported as saying. Part of their plan is to have Christchurch restaurants, bars and cafes become plastic straw free, and a portion of their proceeds will go to DOC to help prevent the unnecessary plastic-related death of land and sea life.

Jacqui says there is a strong demand for the metal straws, which have been marketed for about six months.

Kate was appointed by Rangi Ruru to develop the school's shared vision and to work alongside student-led action groups to support the implementation of a range of initiatives.

"We kicked off changes by displaying three cubic metres of waste outside the entrance to our school chapel, including the contents of 128 large black rubbish bags of mixed waste," Kate says. "As people walked past, the mountainous pile shocked the school; it was alarming to see how much waste we produced daily. That symbolised the end of an era."

That action spearheaded numerous changes, including establishing healthy food and drink habits, changes in boarding house procedures, the adoption in 2016 of a water-only policy and the removal of vending machine products, and the sharing of products across local aid agencies. They also adopted energy and water saving strategies, brought in sustainable landscape design minimising the need for irrigation, started promoting sustainable travel practices and encouraging sustainable procedures around purchasing and waste, and promoted the reuse of materials in Textiles, Performing Arts and Visual Arts sessions.

Plans are afoot to establish a compost digester and biogas production system to convert the school's green waste to gas, thereby meeting its own energy needs, and increase solar power capabilities.

The school also partners with the local community; just one example is their bra collection project, which sees the bras passed on to the oncology department at Christchurch Hospital and then sent to the Pacific islands. Other medical items are collected for reuse, as are books, mobile phones and more.

Recognition for these moves has been significant.

In 2014, Rangi Ruru became a certified Fairtrade School, one of just two in Christchurch, and more recently has become an Enviroschool. For the past two years Rangi Ruru has been carbon neutral. The school's food and drink practices were outlined as an example of good practice in the University of



Auckland Food in Schools Survey, School-FERST National Study of 2016-17. In 2017, a video outlining environmental practices on their farms and at the school made by young farmers in the boarding house took first equal in the national AgRecovery Competition.

Student Rosetta Brown was a finalist in the young legends category of the Keep New Zealand Beautiful Awards. She is Head of Sustainability, a leader of the school's environment club and editor of *Bloom*, a well-being journal promoting healthy habits, and was involved in establishing source separation of waste at the school and steering Rangi Ruru's reuse depot.

The school was also involved in an inspirational Whole House Reuse project and exhibition at Christchurch Museum, and this year, it will be involved in a long-term community regeneration project in the area.

Another Presbyterian school embracing environmental opportunities is St Oran's College in Lower Hutt, where the school's more than 500 pupils in Years 7-13 are encouraged to connect with the environment through holistic education practices underpinned by Christian values.

Much of what has evolved in environmental terms has stemmed from the college's inaugural Year 10 "Fearless Girls, Strong Women" programme, says College principal Jeanette Duffy.

The optional residential programme was launched in 2018, providing an opportunity for pupils to develop their moral compass through connecting with themselves, connecting with others and connecting with the environment. Forty-five girls spent 12 days at Kaitoke

Outdoor Education Centre outside the city, with teaching conducted in the natural environment.

"Much of it was how the girls unpack those learnings in a way that sees them enjoy a variety of outdoor pursuits," Jeanette explains. "We are lucky enough to have a wonderful environment here in Wellington."

Students faced a variety of physical challenges, including surf kayaking, paddleboarding, tramping and mountain biking, and tested their nerve with an afternoon spent "solo" in the bush.

Another initiative saw students clear gorse and plant native trees, as well as put in a park bench and surround it with gravel. Jeanette says there was a range of learning as the girls researched and prepared ahead of time including co-ordinating the fundraising needed to support the project.

"I believe it is important for them to see that initiatives such as these are about faith in action, while also actively contributing to and improving society. The girls learned about our native species and their habitat, and had a huge sense of achievement as they worked together in teams across the weekend creating the legacy trail.

"One way they are looking to do that is to engage with a new teaching programme launched this year called 'Connect'. It offers Year 7 and 8 students a cross-curricular curriculum which allows the girls to connect with their faith and explore relationships with God, themselves and others, and allows them to enhance their hauora, providing an opportunity for them to live out their faith through action.

"It integrates Christian studies, health and inquiry," says Jeanette.

Many other Presbyterian schools are joining together to promote environmental awareness and bring practical changes to their campuses, and also heeding the call from Assembly are Presbyterian parishes.

The Church recently ran a Neighbours Day promotion, offering free native seeds to parishes wanting to be proactive in caring for the green spaces in their community. The uptake was widespread, with parishes around the country asking for seeds to be sent to them.

In his introduction to the Church's Caring for Creation study booklet, the Very Rev Dr Graham Redding said humans have a two-fold responsibility when it comes to the natural world; as both "priests of creation and stewards of creation".

And in his 2019 Lenten message to the Church, Moderator the Rt Rev Fakaofa Kaio, urged people to consider how they are being good neighbours to God's creation.

"In observing our own connection to our faith, we could reflect on how we might do more to care for the green spaces of our church, home, and neighbourhood," he says.

"What changes could we make in our lifestyle habits? In what ways do our choices harm God's creation – its people, creatures and the Earth itself? God's covenant is with all peoples, and let's not forget, with the animals and plants (Genesis 9:9-10; Hosea 2:18). Together, we can plant a small seed and nurture positive change."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



Tune into the Kiwi youth ministry podcast

A youth ministry podcast with a distinctly Kiwi flavour is being run out of the Rangitikei town of Marton by a young Presbyterian host and a guitar-playing Anglican minister.

The collaborative initiative linking host Jasmin Vanderwerff and Rangitikei Anglican Parish youth minister, Rev Tim Duxfield, kicked off last November. Entitled “Youth Ministry in New Zealand”, the podcast features fortnightly interviews of around 40 minutes with a mix of ministry experts and youth pastors.

“To begin with we picked people we know really well... people we trust to share awesome wisdom and stories with our listeners,” Jasmin says.

Jasmin and Tim are ministry leaders working with young people across two denominations. Their view that New Zealand needs a contextualised resource like this comes from a shared belief that many of the 20 or so podcasts already out there don't meet the needs of young Kiwis because the messages come from overseas, primarily the United States.

“A lot of the things they talk about on these American podcasts are not relevant here,” says Tim, citing cultural differences and variants in terms of the size, resourcing and activities undertaken by American and Kiwi youth groups.

The idea of starting one locally came through a casual chat Jasmin had with Presbyterian Youth Ministry (PYM) National Manager Gordon Fitch.

“Together we realised that there wasn't anything like it locally,” she says. “Gordon said I should start one. I thought and prayed about it for a while and talked to other people over a period of about five

months. The one thing I did know was that I didn't want to do it on my own, so I asked Tim if he'd be interested in doing it with me. We wanted this podcast to be something with a wider appeal, to be really ecumenical in the way it feels.”

The pair found the technical help they needed, and were off, working on the premise that the start-up podcast would run for an initial 12 months before they would re-evaluate it.

One of the first interviews aired was with PYM director Matt Chamberlin, with another featuring Presbytery Central's mission catalyst, Susan Blaikie. Both are ardent supporters of Jasmin and Tim's efforts to fulfil their brief to “equip, inspire and uplift all those who want to see young people thrive”.

“Creating a grassroots podcast about youth ministry in New Zealand is a brilliant idea,” says Matt. “We are saturated with great teaching content from overseas, but it is fantastic that both Jasmin and Tim have seen this important niche and filled it with such a high-quality solution. It provides youth workers and leaders with indigenous wisdom in bite-sized chunks they can grab as they're driving to the office.”

He says his podcast on Yasmin and Tim's Youth Ministry in NZ channel about discipleship was aimed at shifting the focus from just a pulpit and Bible study approach to one that emphasises the importance of sharing aspects of everyday life with believers across the generations.

“I've been really encouraged by the far-reaching feedback I have had since the podcast went live,” says Matt. “People have spoken positively about it from different spheres of ministry, even from outside youth ministry. Several have used it as fuel for some really strategic conversations in their organisations.”

Susan is another convert to the world of the podcast. In sharing her role as Presbytery Central mission catalyst on Jasmin and Tim's podcast, she focused her attention on the message “that the disappointments and failures we experience in our Christian walk and ministry are, unfortunately, to be expected”, and said efforts to forgive our enemy, or love those who are difficult to love, often make sense only from a gospel-currency perspective.

Susan, too, has had positive feedback, hers focusing on an appreciation of the line “we are called to be faithful and not successful”.

Through their podcast, Jasmin and Tim hope to engage not only with youth pastors, but with anyone working with young people in New Zealand. It also has the advantage, they say, of pooling both Anglican and Presbyterian networks and resources, and providing broader access to learning experiences that might otherwise be available only to those lucky enough to attend conferences or other national training events.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

SERVING COOK ISLANDS COMMUNITY

Derek Teariki, who attends St Andrews Church in Hastings was recently awarded a Queen's Service Medal for services to the Cook Islands community.

In 1986, Derek arrived in Hawke's Bay to play rugby for Napier Tech. He met his wife Mata and stayed. Now, after almost two decades of working night-shift so that he is available to help his people during the day, he has been honoured as a mainstay of the Cook Islands community with a Queen's Service Medal.

Born in Rarotonga in 1963, Derek came to New Zealand at 17, initially working at Ford Motors. His father, Teariki Vaerua, a minister in the Cook Islands Christian Church was transferred to Otara in South Auckland.

Derek, who says he was brought up to serve church and community, was a secretary for youth and later the men's fellowship, Tanetini, in the Cook Islands Christian Church's central New Zealand region.

He then joined the congregation at St Andrews Presbyterian Church in Hastings where many Cook Islands people have worshipped since the 1950s.

When he moved to Hawke's Bay, Derek found that the community hall had been in the hands of a small group for the past 30 years. "They were running it for their own needs. They forgot that it belongs to the people," he says.

"I did not plan to be a leader, I just got involved. I was in my late twenties and had always been involved in church activities and also community activities. I think when you want to say something, you don't want to say it with no action. You have to walk the talk. You only know by doing it."

Derek formed the Hawke's Bay Cook Islands Council in 1997 to unite the people and get the hall back for their use. He says it took a court case to get the hall back. "The case was finalised in 2005. It cost a lot of money, which is really sad. We did not want to go that way but that was the only way to achieve our aim," says Derek.

The community is still paying the debts incurred, but Derek organised charitable status for the hall and does a lot of fundraising.

The hall was extended in 2011 and can host up to 500 people. Recent visitors have included a group raising money to rebuild



Derek Teariki

schools, churches and meeting houses damaged during hurricane season in the Cook Islands.

The wider community uses the hall for functions such as birthdays, weddings, reunions, workshops and fundraising events. Recently the New Zealand Defence Force made it a base while doing free dental work and medical checks in the community.

Derek formed Pa Metua, the Cook Islands Seniors Society, and runs the weekly exercise class. "After the exercises, we have a cup of tea. The reason behind it is that many older people have lost their partners and this is a place they can come to talk and share," says Derek, who also organises an annual out-of-town trip for the group.

Other events are studied throughout the year. "We created Cook Islands Constitution Day, which we celebrate on the first weekend of August. We have a sports day for youth in October, with netball, rugby, tennis and indoor basketball. And we hold a Pareu night dinner twice a year with a smorgasbord meal, singing, dancing and a live band, with people wearing the traditional Cook Islands sarong.

Derek has worked about 20 years on night shift as a prison officer so he could be available for this work. While he and one of their sons work for the Department of Corrections, Mata and their other son work at the freezing works. The couple now have two grandchildren.

He says of the QSM award, "I just want to honour my parents, for my upbringing, and my brothers and sisters for their support. And a big thank you to the people of the Cook Islands in Hawke's Bay, for putting me forward for that honour. Kia orana e kia manuia."

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)

Caren Rangi on board for leadership

When Caren Rangi tells you she's busy, she isn't kidding. The professional board director was in Auckland for a meeting yesterday, tomorrow she's running a training session in Christchurch and next week she'll be in Nouméa for a two-day board meeting.

Napier-based Caren, New Zealand's only Cook Islands Maori female board director, currently serves on five New Zealand boards, including Te Papa, Creative New Zealand, Pacific Island Home Care Services Trust, Pacific Inc and the Pacific Co-operation Broadcasting Ltd, as well as one in the Cook Islands (Cook Islands Investment Corporation). She also recently started on the board of Tamatea High School in Napier, the college where she was head girl and her son Mika (17) is currently head boy.

It's a work schedule that sees the 51-year-old spend much of her life on planes.

"It does make for a busy life, but I'm honoured to be able to sit at the decision making table for organisations that contribute to the lives of New Zealanders and Cook Islanders," says the mother of Mika and daughter Kaiata (11). "I've also picked areas that I'm passionate about, such as arts and culture, where I feel I can make the best contribution."

Caren, who is a member of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Hastings, originally trained as an accountant. But after working for the Auditor General's Office, she segued into policy and public sector management, including two years working for the Cayman Island government's audit office.

Last year Caren was awarded an ONZM Queen's Honour for services to the Pacific Community and Governance but admits she didn't know any board directors when she was first shoulder-tapped by the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs to serve on a board in 2002.

"The organisation was establishing a Pacific radio network and when I found myself signing a \$7million cheque for 18 radio transmitters, I thought I'd better go and get some training in governance."

Christchurch-born Caren did just that and since then, has served on more than 20 boards – from commercial companies to government bodies and not-for-profits.

She says most people mistakenly think board directors "have an easy life attending meetings". "But it's so much more than that – we set the strategic direction, make the high-level decisions, carry the risk and manage the CEO. The buck stops with us."

Getting more women, and particularly younger women, onto boards is a subject close to Caren's heart and over the years she's run governance training for such women.



Caren Rangi

"We need people with different backgrounds and voices around the decision-making table, not just old men. That includes people of different ethnicities, ages and genders. It's also not just about getting them in the same room, it's about making the most of their differences."

Caren is also keen on giving the Cook Islands Maori community a greater voice. "They might not have a say in the decision making process, particularly new arrivals from the Islands. But it's important their views are heard too."

Caren, who says her faith is tied up not only in the Presbyterian Church but also in St Andrew's large Cook Islands community, works tirelessly to identify and nurture future governance talent.

"It's vital for our future that the voices of the many are heard. I work with people who want to find out more about how governance works, as well as providing training and advice."

The key to making her busy life work is the support of her partner McKenzie, a freezing worker, as well as her parents, who live nearby.

Caren is also getting better at scheduling breaks throughout the year to help recharge the batteries.

"I always book December and most of January off, because that's when the kids are off school. It's important for me to spend as much time with them as possible before they grow up and do their own thing."

As for the future, Hawke's Bay will always be home. But Caren is keen to spend longer in Rarotonga than she currently does.

"At the moment, I'm there for work one week every two months, but as McKenzie was born and bred in the Cook Islands, he's also keen to spend more time there and maybe even live there."

Sharon Stephenson [Spanz](#)



Responsibility for setting policies ensuring the safety of children in church environments has shifted from parish to national level with the completion of a national Child Protection Policy.

The new policy was published last December as a stand-alone Supplementary Provision to the Church's Book of Order.

Book of Order Advisory Committee convenor the Very Rev Pamela Tankersley oversaw the six-month project to create the new policy, which was drafted by her team and staff from Kids Friendly and Presbyterian Youth Ministry.

"Child safety has always been a non-negotiable," explains Pamela. "The heart of our Church is our children. They are gifts of God, but a child safe culture requires competent and committed governance and leadership to ensure there are no gaps in the process."

The other driver for change, she says, is the increased awareness at a secular level of children in institutions, including the extension to faith-based institutions of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care.

"We can't change the past," Pamela acknowledges, "but as one of the bodies that will be cooperating with the Commission, we wanted to demonstrate a proactive approach to having best practice systems in place going forward. It was a bigger task than we imagined, so it wasn't ready to present to Assembly, but we're really pleased to have the new policy implemented for 2019."

Youth Ministry National Director Matt Chamberlin agrees. "The Church is coming under increased scrutiny and in order to maintain a respected place in the community we need to work intentionally to maintain high ethical and safety standards. This new policy has gone through so many great channels and been very well thought out."

During the drafting stages, the policy was consulted on widely with practitioners on the ground, by the specialist agency Child Matters, and by legal authorities.

Enacting the new policy will be led by presbyteries and parishes, which are now required to appoint a safety officer. The officer's responsibility it is to ensure any suspected child abuse is appropriately reported, and to coordinate training for

all volunteers and paid staff that work with children and young people (aged under 18).

The policy includes safe recruitment and working practices. It has detailed information about how to recognise abuse and neglect, procedures for reporting and responding to allegations against church leaders and keeping families informed. The Church must also comply with the Privacy Act.

Kids Friendly took part in the drafting process and its administrative assistant Julie Taylor Penno makes the point that responsibility for a child's safety extends beyond the Church-based context.

"The Child Matters training uses a phrase, 'five sets of eyes', which means every child needs five sets of eyes looking out for them and ensuring their needs are being met," she explains. "Our Church's children and family workers can be one of those sets of eyes. The policy guides us in who to talk with and how to take the action required if we notice that something 'doesn't look right'."

Training has been specifically integrated into the Church's safety warrant of fitness (WOF) course. After completing initial warrant of fitness training, a three-yearly refresher is required.

"Most of the incidents of harm to children through church involvement could have easily been avoided with the right structure and training," says Matt. "When the issue of safety training comes to mind, most people would rather go to the dentist, but the WOF is team-based and scenario-driven, which makes the day fun and engaging."

Congregations must comply with the policy by the end of 2019, and to support this, the revised WOF training days are being held around the regions between now and November. If other commitments prevent attendance in person, video-based WOF training will also be available from 1 August. For more details, including training dates and locations, go to www.pym.org.nz.

A copy of the full Child Protection Policy can be downloaded or viewed from the home page of the Church's website at www.presbyterian.org.nz.

More information about police vetting is also available on the website or by contacting the Assembly Office on 04 801 6000.

Jade Reidy Spanz

PASIFIKA CHURCH CELEBRATES



The Pacific Islanders Presbyterian Church (PIPC) Newton's 70th anniversary celebrations late last year drew crowds from far and wide to celebrate and share memories of a place that generations of Pasifika call home.

The actual anniversary date of Wednesday 28 November was celebrated with a combined service and cutting of the cake, led by the senior ministers Rev Maafalo Koko, Rev Henry Wichman and Rev Kontiki Makani. The following Sunday, over 500 people filled both levels of the hall for worship followed by a shared Pasifika lunch.

"A lot of preparation and contributions went into ensuring there was plenty of food on the day," says PIPC's session clerk Mosotele Seta Efaraimo. "It was a special occasion."

The Newton Church was Congregational at the beginning in 1943 with services for Cook Islanders and Niueans at Beresford St Church. In 1948, Newton Parish offered their premises for evening services. From those pioneering days the Pacific Island church movement grew from inner city Auckland to throughout the Auckland Region, Wellington and beyond. The merger with the Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand took place in 1970.

Two years later, Te Aka Puaho gifted the Maori Hall to PIPC Newton. During the week-long anniversary celebrations, the Maori Hall hosted a living faith museum. The venue, says curator Roz Tuitama, was symbolic of Tangata Whenua embracing the Pacific nations.

"Our people literally stepped off the boat, came and set up home here in faith," Roz says. "A lot of people don't know our



Decades of photographs and church memorabilia were on display at a living faith museum.

story. That's why we wanted to tell it." The museum was a "living" one because the exhibits changed daily during the week it was open, displayed under vibrant tivaevae suspended from the ceiling. "As more people came through, they brought new items with them from their living rooms," Roz explains. "You felt like you were walking into the homes we grew up in during the '70s."

Mosotele says that in the early years, four or five key families in the area were the backbone of the church, and they fostered immigrants from the Cook Islands, then Niue and Samoa as they arrived.

"For example the Yandall sisters and the Lelaulu girls," he says. "The church was far more than just a church. It became a cultural hub for early migrants to form new communities, a beacon of Pacific Islandness in the middle of K' Road. And now they return because it's a comfort thing."

While photographs displayed by decade dominated the displays, there were also choir gowns which represented a snapshot of the immense choral history of Pacific Island choirs; marriage registers dating back to the 1800s; baptismal records and eldership logs.

The level of interest the museum generated was beyond their expectations.

"It was intended to be just for the five days but the museum went viral on social media and stayed up until February!" she remarks. "Pasifika people saw their stories told their way. It made them

realise "my story's worth telling". Many stayed three to four hours. One elderly man in his eighties and with dementia started weeping and talking to the photos as though they were real people. Until then he didn't recognise anyone."

Auckland Museum brought along its staff and intends incorporating some of the exhibits into its 2020 Auckland History exhibition, as well as archiving the marriage registers. A Unitec photographer has curated a photographic record of the artefacts and the intention is to create a book.

Mosotele sees PIPC's eighth decade ahead as one of rebuilding. The Church is still important today to Pasifika, he says, although its role has evolved.

"They all drive here now. Nobody walks," says Mosotele. "And the youth have also gone to more evangelical churches with a more inclusive type of worship. We have an ageing congregation and infrastructure, but there's still a need for an inner city church."

The church operates a number of programs including monthly food baskets for families; feeding the homeless; a chaplaincy service at Auckland Hospital; free fitness programmes; elderly outings and community use of the hall for events.

Images and memories from the living faith museum are hosted on coconet at www.thecoconet.tv. Using the search term "PIC Museum".

Jade Reidy Spanz



God as a spacemaker

"Welcome Home" by Dave Dobbyn, was the song I asked to be sung at my induction as Principal of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. Returning to Aotearoa from Australia in 2015, it meant a lot to hear the Presbyterian Church sing: "See I make a space for you". It felt like a karakia of welcome, words of invitation that I was hearing from God through the Church.

"Welcome Home" was released in 2005. Then in 2017, the song was re-released as "Nau Mai Rā". Dobbyn had begun to learn Maori, working on his pronunciation with Te Haumihia Mason prior to recording with the Maimoa choir. Making space was not only a song written once, but an ongoing invitation to change and grow.

In Genesis 26, God is revealed as a spacemaker, a singer of "Welcome Home". Isaac's family has grown and his herds have increased in number. With limited resources, the local king (Abimelek) asks them to move.

Water remains essential and as Isaac moves, he becomes a digger of wells. Water is found and there is joy. But quarrels break out: "This water is ours!" say the herders of Gerar (Gen 26:20). That well is called Esek – "dispute" – and again Isaac and his family must move.

A second well is dug. Again there is water and again the joy is shortlived. This well is called Sitnah – "quarrel" (Gen 26:21).

So a third well is dug. This well is called Rehoboth – "the Lord has made room for us." This time joy is sustained. God is revealed as a space-maker, in words (Rehoboth) and actions (the joy of sustained drinking).

In the Bible, wells point to the value of life. In arid environments, water is scarce. Consequently, wells also have a social function as locations where people gather and strangers connect.

The Bible's last story of a well is in John 4. As in the Old Testament, wells are a place for the thirsty to gather. Yet as Jesus arrives in need of water, wells become places of redemption as the incarnation changes everyday life (John 4:14).

Missionary and researcher Paul Hiebert has applied the Biblical image of wells to Christian mission and ministry. He contrasts two approaches to managing stock. Farmers tend to build fences for security. However in arid environments, fences are not needed. Simply dig wells, for the reality of thirst ensures that animals never wander. Hiebert suggests that Christian ministry is also about digging wells, providing social places for the thirsty to gather around Christ.

In recent years, we at Knox Centre have asked ourselves what it means to dig wells rather than build fences. What does God as a spacemaker mean for Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership? As this year began, we tried an experiment. For the first time ever in the Presbyterian Church, Local Ordained (LOM) probationers were invited to learn with interns for National Ordained Ministry (NOM).

For two days, blockcourse teaching on the practices of ministry were unfenced, offered as an experiment to anyone training for Presbyterian specified ordained ministries.

It felt like a Rehoboth moment. There was water gushing in the form of joy and sustained gratitude as input on leadership, worship, pastoral care and preaching was experienced as life giving. "I felt honoured," said one LOM. "I learnt from hearing different perspectives," said a NOM. Together, God was experienced as a space-maker.

It is hard work digging wells. It takes effort in a time of limited resources. But a lesson in theology matters had been experienced. God is a spacemaker and joy is sustained as we do the hard work of digging wells.

– Rev Dr Steve Taylor, Principal of Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership



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CHURCH BUILDS LIFE SKILLS AND FAITH



Fa'aulu Tomuli-Afoa, left, and Leilani Meleisea-Hoyt, right, with some of the Onehunga Co-operating Parish youth involved in The Cottage Hub.

Christ-centred teachings providing life and leadership training for young Pasifika parishioners are at the heart of a new initiative underway at Auckland's Onehunga Co-operating Parish.

Known as The Cottage Hub, the programme supports about 100 parish youth by offering career and life leadership training across different areas. These include career planning, literacy and numeracy, confident communication, overcoming fears and roadblocks, health and wellbeing, and practical skills such as driver licensing and budgeting advice.

An off-shoot "Cottage Club" runs weekly Bible study and life application sessions, where participants share their overall progress and receive additional support.

Help to get the Hub off the ground in practical terms came via a \$2,500 grant from PressGo, which bolstered funds raised from within the church community itself. "The grant enabled us to plan and set up the programme... we are very grateful to PressGo," say the Hub's project leaders Fa'aulu Tomuli-Afoa and Leilani Meleisea-Hoyt. "We have been able to buy resources to help create and deliver engaging and effective lessons and activities."

In their 2018 application to PressGo, Fa'aulu and Leilani laid out the project's objectives: to fulfil the church's calling to help weave Christ through the lives of its young people, to help better equip young people to realise their potential, to develop young church and community leaders, and to provide leadership across important areas of their lives.

PressGo Catalyst Lisa Wells says once Onehunga's application had established its focus, it fitted the criteria around people-to-people mission.

The Hub also aims to provide a platform for the further development of youth across five congregational groups within the combined church. When Onehunga Co-operating Parish was established in 1996, it united the local Church of Christ, Methodist and Presbyterian churches into one parish. Current membership across its five congregations includes European, Korean and Indian parishioners as well as Pasifika people of Samoan, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tongan and Fijian descent.

Around 100 of those parishioners are youth aged 16 and up, says Leilani; some are from low socio-economic communities who are in greater need of a helping hand.

"It is our hope that there will be a positive impact on our church families through those young people using The Cottage services," she says. "This programme invests in our young people... it will progress and impact their lives and those of their families. By working towards sustainable career pathways, we hope they will prosper going forward and in turn, help grow the church mission."

The concept aimed at "empowering, equipping and enabling" the young people of the parish grew out of a desire Fa'aulu and Leilani had to apply the skills they had garnered during their own time with the church. They wanted to help support the younger generation as they navigate through life.

"Our mission was to help our youth become confident and capable in areas such as education, careers, personal goals and overall life," they explain. "Within our church there is much potential in youth leadership, and the young people are abundant."

"However, after many conversations we found there was a yearning for support in areas like career aspirations, job prospects and applications, CV building, budgeting and sustainable employment. We ran a survey that revealed the type of support they needed. We found that most are either unemployed or in casual work... they were seeking support, but didn't know where to go or what to do."

The Hub works in two ways: it provides career counselling and support at The Cottage onsite at Onehunga Co-operating Church from Tuesdays to Fridays, and holds its "Cottage Club" Bible study and life applications sessions on Monday evenings.

"We are working through each youth group, and so far, we have surveyed about 40 young people, providing the information they need and putting plans in place for them," Fa'aulu says. "About 10 people consistently attend Cottage Club on Mondays. The feedback has been excellent. It proves they are enjoying the initiatives and growing in their faith. They are starting to see that coming to church doesn't have to just be for Sunday services, but also for further holistic support for their future."

The programme will be ongoing, she says, with future plans including workshops around digital and financial literacy.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

HAMILTON CHURCHES HELPING COMMUNITY



“Amazing”, “enthusiastic” and “great leadership potential: these are just a few of the words used to describe Chartwell Co-operating Church’s Brad Clarke, who has worked with the Hamilton church to review, revamp and run its youth programmes.

“Brad had previously worked for us five hours a week for the past two years,” says Erica Harris, fundraising team leader for the Chartwell Co-operating Church. “But then he needed a job over the university holidays and so he came on for 35 hours a week.”

Those extra hours were made possible by \$7,000 of funding from PressGo, which supports promising mission and growth ideas within the Church.

“We were thrilled to receive this funding, which made it possible to bring Brad on for 35 hours from November to February to help us evaluate and change our youth programmes,” says Erica.

That included a week’s school holiday programme in January, priced so that parents could afford it. “The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with kids wanting to return. It was also a chance for Brad to expand his leadership role by planning and running the programme.”

Another initiative is the revamped Sunday morning youth programmes: Ignite, for younger children, which is aimed at helping them become more familiar with the Bible; and Connect for older children, which dives deeper into Bible stories. “It’s about analysing what these stories tell us, what we like and don’t like about these stories and how they impact on our lives.”

Brad also helped with reworking the weekly Messy Church format, putting activities and games first and the shared worship time after that. “We’re so grateful for the PressGo funding that enabled Brad to undertake all of this work,” says Erica. “I would recommend other churches to ask them for help as it can make a real difference to the church and community.”

Across town, Rev Mike Uttley is also thankful for three contributions from PressGo, which enabled the Fairfield parish to employ community/whanau worker, Christine Harding in August 2017. Initially that was only for 10 hours a week, but additional funding has allowed Christine to work for 20 hours a week.

Mike says one of his two churches sits within a low-socio economic area and, like many parishes, faces declining congregation numbers.

“We have an ageing congregation so we need to grow the numbers of younger people,” says Mike. “But we need resources to be able to do that strategically. It’s not just a case of getting the right people on the bus, but finding them the right seats.”

Enter Christine Harding, who was moving back to Hamilton to become an ordained Presbyterian minister. “I was curious about Mike’s church and so went along to see him,” says Christine.

It was the start of her new role where she’s been involved in mentoring programmes like Iconz, which used to be Boy’s Brigade, but has been revamped for boys and girls. Since Christine came on board, this programme now attracts up to 44 boys and 32 girls each week. “We’ve actually had to cap the numbers for the girls’ Iconz because we don’t have enough leaders or the available church space to run this programme easily.”

The PressGo funding has also allowed Christine to assist with the parish Alpha course, which is aimed at helping people find and follow Jesus. Christine, who was ordained last year, also has responsibility for Fairfield’s Sunday children’s programme, Messy Church development and a female discipleship programme.

“Having Christine take on some of our enormous workload has been wonderful,” says Mike. “I would definitely recommend PressGo to churches looking for assistance.”

Lisa Wells, PressGo Catalyst, says both these Hamilton churches were selected for the way they engage with their community. “One of the things we look for is how authentically the church is engaging with its community and crafting the way it is in mission to that unique context,” says Lisa. “Although programmes for the young people who are already part of the church are important, PressGo’s focus is on innovation, creativity and being open to the leading of the Spirit as the church joins in God’s mission in the world.”

Sharon Stephenson | [Spanz](#)

JUSTICE conference OPENS EYES

VICTORY

THE JUSTICE CONFERENCE

Hannah North and Ed Smart represented the PCANZ at a recent justice conference.

Three young Presbyterians attended the Justice Conference in Auckland in November 2018.

“Whakahoungia: all things new” was the theme of the two-day forum, which brought together a range of justice-oriented Christian organisations.

The Justice Conference movement started in Oregon in 2010 with the aim of connecting a generation to a shared concern for social justice, and the New Zealand event is one of several Justice Conferences held worldwide.

Three youth leaders represented the Presbyterian Church at this year's Auckland event: Emma Page of the Northern Presbytery, Ed Smart of Forrest Hill Presbyterian Church and Hannah North of Greyfriars Presbyterian Church.

They all found it rewarding and challenging and said they would recommend the conference to others.

Emma says: “There has been a lot of conversation around social justice in the media and in youth ministry circles so I was keen to hear more about these issues. We are called to care for creation and each other. We have a responsibility to look after this world God has created for us and to love our neighbours, so we need to put those words into action and show we love others and care for the world.”

By becoming involved in social justice issues, Emma believes young people can be a voice for those who are in need and contribute to their own future and that of others.

“I was challenged by what was shared about bi-culturalism in New Zealand. Hearing from the keynote speakers and workshop presenters about their experiences of being Maori and the barriers they face challenged my thinking. So did the speakers talking about human trafficking and climate change.

“At conferences there is often one really good speaker, but here they all were, and the workshops were informative and engaging. It was all quite profound and I genuinely came away thinking about it and found myself thinking about it beyond the conference. I still am thinking about it and remembering the information that was shared. There is a lot to process,” says Emma.

Ed wanted to go to the conference because his youth group at Forrest Hill has a passion for justice, and he wanted to look at the different areas they could work in.

“The concept of justice seems overwhelming, but we can narrow it down and see practical ways in which to provide justice in our own area,” says Ed. “Young people don't know how to get started, but they have a passion to get on with it. So let's help them. Our group is talking about wanting to stop bullying at school, for example.”

For Ed, the most challenging aspect of the conference was learning where our investment money goes.

“As Christians we should care about that because we could be supporting injustice without realising it. We need to consider how can we invest with good moral values rather than allowing our money to be invested in things we don't want to be involved in.”

Ed hopes to take along members of his youth group in the future.

Hannah is involved in the World Communion of Reformed Churches and had been looking at the roots of injustice between genders, and jumped at the opportunity to go the conference.

“Theology and justice should go hand in hand. As Presbyterians we believe Christ is at the top of our governing system, so we should be involved in the work Christ is doing in the world.

“It was really positive to see the number of people actively engaged in social justice in their communities and in the wider context. Often, we think of justice in terms of international issues and forget that there are community-based initiatives here.

Hannah found two areas challenging.

“I learned that some of the larger banks invest in places we might consider unethical and that some organisations aiming to help people do not ensure that they protect those whose stories they use in fundraising campaigns.

“We hear so often that youth are ‘the future’. But their generation is now, actually. Youth are willing to engage in the world. They have a voice and opinions. We do not need to keep feeding young people full of information, but get them engaged so they can make a difference in their own lives and the wider community.”

Jane Tolerton [@spanz](#)

JOY CLUB

10 TURNS

The Joy Club run by Blenheim's St Andrew's Presbyterian Church is ten years old – and thriving.

Lay preacher David Clode leads the Joy Club services from a wheelchair.

He has cerebral palsy and wanted to set up a group so that people with disabilities could meet in a regular church environment, and worship safely and happily together.

The Joy Club celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2017 and last September a celebratory communion service was taken by Marion Rowe, another lay preacher who is a member of the club.

The meetings, on the first Thursday of the month, usually attract about 25 people. They begin with a church service, hymns, prayers, a Bible reading and a reflection. This is followed by a catch-up and a meal. "Happy Birthday" is sung to those who had birthdays in the previous month. Lunch is provided by a different Blenheim church each month.

"Last month was lasagne with coleslaw, followed by cheesecake with cream and jelly," David explains.

"The meals vary, but we are pretty spoilt. At Christmas, we usually have a themed meal, and some groups have provided barbecues during the summer months. We have a barbecue at Koromiko, near Picton, every February, which is a good way to regroup and start the year together after the holidays."

David has been at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church since 1992, and has been an accredited lay preacher since 2000. He set up the club in 2005 with two

others: Reverend Johanna Warren, who was the minister at the church at that time, and Bev Reid who had worked with the Christian Fellowship for the Disabled.

Originally, the aim was to provide services for those with intellectual disabilities, but the scope was expanded to include anyone with a disability. Most Joy Club members live in the family homes run by IDEA Services.

David prepares and runs the services, and phones people each month to remind them the service is on.

"The Joy Club gives me a great deal of personal fulfilment. I really value the contribution I am able to make to other people's lives," he writes.

"The group is very special because it gives members the opportunity to spend time with people who have similar disabilities and share common interests. Members really enjoy the time they spend with one another as it is the only time in a month when they can just be themselves within a group outside of where they live. Friendships have formed and flourished as a result. And I have been told that for some people it is the highlight of their month."



Photo: iStock/Cary Radler

The Joy Club provides a place for people with disabilities to meet and worship.

Rev Derek Harding steps in if David is not available in a given month. The support team includes: Jane Heywood, who looks after the rosters of those providing the meal each month; Dawn Neal, who helps with the sound system; Liz Koppert who organises the overheads; and Christine Kippert and Dicky Willemsen who set tables and make sure of the smooth running of the events.

"Without such a dedicated team of people, this ministry would not exist," writes David.

Lisa Rolf who attends Joy Club says she has enjoyed making friends with the helpers as well as other local people with disabilities. "I feel fully accepted at Joy Club. I like being in a situation in which I do not feel as if I am the only one who is 'different'. I can follow the services and I really enjoy them."

Parish clerk Jane Heywood says she loves organising the meals for the club. "Nobody does anything for these people, and they really do enjoy it. It's camaraderie for them, and for us it is a fulfilling way of widening our outreach to grow our church community."

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)



NEW HOME FOR POHUTUKAWA COAST CHURCH

After years spent worshipping at various venues around their region, the Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church finally has a home of its own.

Their new church at Maraetai, south-east of Auckland, was officially opened at a special dedication ceremony on 10 March, led by the Very Rev Garry Marquand and attended by guests that included Moderator, the Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio, and Moderator of the Northern Presbytery, Rev Steve Millward.

Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church replaces Maraetai's St David's by the Sea and St Andrews by the Sea in Beachlands. Since both buildings were sold years ago, their combined congregations have met at various venues in the area, most recently at the Maraetai Bowling Club.

Also attending the official opening were members of a family with special ties to the land on which the church was built.

In 1985 a member of the congregation, Audrey Dickie, dreamed of a new Presbyterian Church on the Pohutukawa Coast. She donated over a hectare of land for the project in 2008, and had her dream realised when construction of the new building, designed by architect Jane Waugh, was completed in time to hold the first service in December last year.

A special guest at the official opening was Audrey Dickie's daughter, Denise Bulluss. As she cut the ribbon, she was watched with pride by members of the extended Dickie family, past and present members of the congregation, other ministers and representatives of the Franklin Local Board.

In his address at the opening, the Very Rev Marquand said: "Audrey was an ordinary but wonderful member of the congregation... she had a vision beyond the local church of reaching out to the local community. She had a desire to see a place established here where God's work could continue and be expanded."

Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian is led by interim moderator, Rev Mark Chapman. Delighting in the story of how the new church came to be, he said: "It really comes down to a small leadership team who determined against the odds to rise from what was near defeat to believe in their future in God."

Session clerk Lyn Buchanan, who has been with the congregation for about 30 years, is equally grateful to those who helped turn the church from dream to reality.

"A building project is a challenging and testing journey. It's a time of staying strong in your belief, putting your trust in God, being encouraged and keep moving forward," she says. "Through the support, help and many prayers of the leadership and congregation over these past years, we were able to do this."



Audrey Dickie's daughter, Denise Bulluss, cutting the ribbon at the official opening of the new Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church.



Handing over the new Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church keys to the Very Rev Garry Marquand at the official opening is the building's architect, Jane Waugh. Watching on is Moderator, the Rt Rev Fakaofu Kaio.

"Without the help and support from our neighbour churches, St Columba Botany and Clevedon, as well as Northern Presbytery, who provided a grant to go towards the building project, it may not have happened. We now have a place not only for worship, but a place where we can stretch out the hand of love and support to help people who may be in need."

With the new church's auditorium still to be completed, the congregation is gathering in the café area for the time being. "It's actually quite a large area which forms part of the foyer. It can accommodate around 90 people... but we're working towards raising the extra funds needed to complete the auditorium."

A successful application was made to Auckland Council's Franklin Local Board to assist with predator control.

"We purchased two possum traps and one stoat trap, and were given four rat traps," says Lyn. "We've eradicated seven possums and 14 rats, and are hoping to encourage birds and plants. We want to be a good neighbour to both Omana Regional Park and to our residential families. We've also planted a lot of Pohutukawa trees, and will plant more native trees once the seedlings we are growing are ready."

Even with the seedlings still growing and the auditorium yet to be completed, the growing Pohutukawa Coast Presbyterian Church congregation is buzzing.

Lyn says: "We want to say a big thank you to everyone who stepped out in support of the project, those who never doubted, stayed strong and fought to make it happen."

Viv Posselt **Spanz**

Indonesia partnership deepens

St John's in the City, Wellington is living proof that a congregation can intentionally nurture a direct relationship with an Asian Christian church with four million members.

In August last year, St John's in the City formalised its partnership with the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Church of Indonesia, the country's largest Protestant church, during a visit from one of HKBP's key pastoral leaders.

Rev Debora Sinaga met with representatives from Presbytery Central and Assembly Office to exchange gifts and share experiences of Christ's Church. She then signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for hosting exchange visits between St John's in the City and the HKBP. The MOU outlines the motivating influences and practical obligations of each host, such as expenses and accommodation.

Debora's visit was timed to support the arrival in the Capital of one of its church's newly ordained ministers, Rev Ridho Kardo Parhusip, who was the first to experience a three-month cross-cultural stay in Wellington.

"We extended the invitation after receiving such gracious hospitality in Sumatra during our first brief visit the previous year," says minister St John's Rev Allister Lane. "The intention was for someone in their formational stage of ministry to dive into a new context they could reflect on afterwards."

Although St John's in the City has around 25 Indonesians in its church community, Ridho stayed in eight different English-speaking homes during his three months, to give him a language immersion experience. He also completed modules developed by Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership on the history of Christianity in New Zealand, and pastoral care and mission.



Rev Rev Ridho Kardo Parhusip (right) was blown away by West Wind wind farm at Makara, Wellington.

"When we talked with Indonesian church leaders in 2017 about how best to foster the relationship their key request was teaching English," says Allister. "They explained that for a minister in Indonesia, being able to speak English in a range of contexts enhances their leadership potential. We took some time to reconcile that request with our initial doubts about the lessons from colonial history."

Ridho led worship in Bahasa Indonesia for St John's in the City native speakers, which was "a welcome experience" says Allister.

"The Indonesians in our community are proud of their country and its culture and want to share it. We also have a proactive Indonesian Ambassador in Wellington who has met with inner city clergy to discuss among other things how religion operates in Indonesia."

For Ridho, observing and taking part in a wide range of worship, study group and outreach activities generated new and at times thought-provoking ideas, explains Allister.

"Ridho noticed LGBTQI issues being raised in different ways here. Less controversially perhaps, he picked up on our weekly offering for the local food bank and thought that could work back home."

Ridho has returned to Sumatra to work for the HKBP's national church, specifically with children at risk and in orphanages.

"We continue to take an interest in his ministry," affirms Allister.

Since then and under the banner of St John's in the City, a 10-member group headed to the island of Sulawesi in December 2018. The participants were an equal mix of Indonesian and Kiwi-born, and this second short cross-cultural exchange was again led by St John's Church elder Ino Pasullean.

The location was chosen because a congregation member has a connection there. During the 10 days in Sulawesi's largest city Makassar and in scenic Toraja, the group visited an orphanage, a theological college, schools and churches. They participated in worship and were interviewed for an hour on Christian radio.

"These trips are an opportunity for members of our congregation to get to know each other better as well as an enriching cross-cultural exchange," says Allister. "I also feel that Indonesia in general doesn't get the attention it deserves, given that it's the world's fourth most populous nation and is on track to becoming the next economic Asian Tiger. At St John's we're fortunate that the Indonesian members of our congregation are helping us to navigate a relationship with the largest Protestant church in what is predominantly a Muslim country. There's a high level of grace being shown to us and it's a fascinating journey."

Jade Reidy Spanz

Taiwan forum highlights importance of ecumenical relations

It was a chance visit to a down-town Taipei park that really brought home the reality of Taiwan's social justice situation for Rev Phil King.

The Global Mission Coordinator was in Taiwan in November last year for the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF), hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). The three-day gathering in Hsinchu, which hosted ecumenical partners from around the world, was promoted as being "a prophetic call to journey together with the PCT in pursuit of justice and peace for the people of Taiwan and Asia-Pacific".

"I had some free time in Taipei before heading to the meeting, so I went for a walk to the nearby 228 Peace Park," says Phil. "While there, I read about a massacre that occurred on 28 February 1947, ushering in a period of martial law that lasted for 40 years, known as the White Terror Era. During this period of Taiwan's history, thousands were killed and imprisoned."

That number included many from PCT, including General Secretary Rev Dr CM Kao who was jailed for more than four years in the '70s for harbouring a political dissident.

Although it was Phil's third visit to Taiwan, he admits he knew very little of the political history of this country of 23 million.

"I had only recently begun to know more about the extent of Taiwan's international isolation. I didn't understand how serendipitous that visit to Peace Park was, and how significant it was in terms of the theme of TEF. The forum largely focused on peace and justice issues stemming from that period of history, to help strengthen and widen ecumenical participation in the pilgrimage for justice and peace in North East Asia with Taiwan as a case study in conflict management and resolution."



Global Mission Coordinator Phil King was inspired by his visit to the Taiwan Peace Park 228.

TEF also called for solidarity with Taiwan's indigenous people and with the PCT as it seeks national dignity and national sovereignty for Taiwan.

In fact, Phil says the welcome address of PCT General Secretary Rev Lyim Hong-Tiong at the TEF stressed the point that "Taiwan is experiencing the most severe isolation of its history".

"Taiwan has no access to the UN and we discussed many other examples of China's bullying tactics. The PCT is quite isolated domestically, due largely to its social justice stance and political views. It has been criticised for its political activism and has long been alienated from Taiwan's other denominations due to ideological differences."

In fact, almost all participants at the TEF were from overseas churches and organisations. It's why ecumenical relationships for PCT are so important, added Phil.

"These relationships and international friendships have been described as a window to the world for Taiwan. Walking alongside the PCT cannot be done without understanding the unique context of Taiwan and the PCT's commitment to radical engagement in that context."

This visit was, says Phil, an opportunity to reconnect with the PCT and make plans to work more closely together.

One of the key outcomes of the November forum for Phil and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

(PCANZ) is the meeting he held with PCT youth and ecumenical leaders.

"Arrangements have been made for our Church to host an Ecumenical Youth Exchange Programme (EYEP) in July this year. This will involve a team of young adults from the PCT who will spend two weeks in New Zealand being hosted by our congregations. They will participate in youth ministry programmes and be guests at PYM's national youth leaders' training weekend, Connect."

It's an added bonus that Connect is being held at Te Aka Puaho's Te Maungarongo marae in Ohope, says Phil.

"Taiwan's indigenous population (sometimes referred to as Austronesian) have an affinity with Maori and Pacific peoples, and it will be meaningful for the Taiwanese youth to be hosted on the marae. We are also hoping to host a delegation of youth leaders from the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu at the same time who will share in a multicultural programme with the PCT youth, culminating in the Connect weekend. I'm excited about the possibilities for developing programmes like this with our global mission partners."

It's also hoped the visit will be reciprocated by the Taiwanese, with PCT hosting a New Zealand Presbyterian youth team sometime in 2020.

Sharon Stephenson Spanz

Vanuatu missionaries return

Six New Zealand volunteers, who for the past few years have been engaged in a variety of Global Mission roles for the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV), came home at the end of 2018 with a singularly changed perspective on life.

Despite encountering different challenges, each has returned re-invigorated in their faith and with a new appreciation for the impact mission work can make.

Neville and Gloria Jones took up their Global Mission role in Vanuatu shortly before Cyclone Pam hit in 2015. The category five storm caused widespread damage and changed their mission from teaching to disaster recovery; it also made full use of their background in the New Zealand Army.

The couple had been part of an earlier mission team and have served with a regular church outreach in Vanuatu for several years. Gloria has applied her skills in dental outreach work and helped with children's reading.

"The Vanuatu people are very community-orientated, and while at times working on my own with the village people was challenging in material terms, relying on God for everyday needs was very enriching," she says. "It has changed my life a lot. Material things, money, are not that important."

Neville agrees, describing their years of mission as among the "most enriching experiences" he has had. "The challenges were many, but it has taught me that God takes care of our needs." He suggests global mission work isn't for everyone but urges those called to it to allow themselves to be led by God.

Martyn and Annette Vincent visited the Jones' in Vanuatu just after Cyclone Pam, later completing a mission tour of their own. Martyn applied his accountancy background to assist PCV and quantity surveyor Annette used her skills in the



Rev Dawn Daunauda with her Diploma One class at Vanuatu's Talua Theological Training Institute.



Annette and Martyn Vincent during their Global Mission tour in Vanuatu.



Global Mission volunteers Gloria and Neville Jones with the President of Vanuatu, Tallis Obed Moses, his wife Estella and their grandsons, who visited the Jones' before their departure.

healthcare sector and in administration. Both say they have grown spiritually.

"Doing something like this for someone else, especially overseas, was quite a step for us in terms of our faith. I have come back knowing that God has a plan for all of us, and that mission work is as much about spreading His word as it is about helping people," says Martyn, an ordained elder with the Knox Christian Centre in Hamilton East.

Annette helped deliver a sweeping new health programme at village level. "I found the call to make myself available to do anything that was needed very humbling."

The "selfless dedication" of both couples was noted by PCV before they left Vanuatu, with thanks given for their service at the 2018 PCV Assembly.

Presbyterian Church Global Mission Co-ordinator Phil King said all six of those now back in New Zealand had been well accepted in their roles because they respected the culture of Vanuatu and the leadership of the PCV.

"They were excellent ambassadors for the Christian faith, as well as for our Church," he adds. "It's important for us to look beyond ourselves; to share our faith, our experience and our resources, both human and material with the worldwide body of Christ. In doing so, we are enriched."

Another Global Mission volunteer, registered nurse Nicola Young, arrived in Vanuatu just before Cyclone Pam struck. After initially helping with emergency response, she moved into a health sector role, aligning with the PCV for the last two of her four years there.

Nicola found the "marked difference" in the way of life both enlightening and challenging, and said an outsider's perspective around the lack of resources emphasised the unimportance of material possessions. "It helped us review what we think we need in life. The Ni-Vanuatu people have strong family values and the church is often central to life. They are very resilient, consciously humble and patient people."

Phil King and Global Mission worked hard to ensure the volunteers' work had sound local buy-in, she says.

Anglican minister Rev Dawn Daunauda spent 10 months teaching at Vanuatu's Talua Theological Training College. After being caught up in evacuations linked to the Nelson fires on her return, then re-settling into an interim position in North Canterbury, she is grateful for the lessons the islands gave on living a simpler life.

"Life in Vanuatu poses different challenges," she says, "but the blessings far outweigh the challenges."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY IN

FIJI



Photo: CWS/Trish Murray

Chantelle Khan, SEEP Director, near one of the isolated villages where SEEP will be working to strengthen local democracy.

Presbyterian and Methodist women have taken up a big challenge with this year's Special Project – supporting the Go Organic! Grow Organic! project that aims to strengthen democracy in Fiji.

Bellyful, an organisation that provides meals for families with new babies struggling with illness will also benefit from funds raised by the Special Project.

Christian World Service partner, Social Empowerment Education Programme (SEEP), oversees the Go Organic! Grow Organic! programme, which will be launched in July.

Go Organic! Grow Organic! aims to strengthen local participation, especially by women and young people, growing "organic" democracy from the grassroots up.

On hearing news that the Special Project would fundraise for SEEP in 2019, director Chantelle Khan, wrote: "We acknowledge with gratitude, the kindness and warmth coming from your lands to ours... *Vinaka vakalevu na loloma* (Thank you for the love)".

Go Organic! Grow Organic! builds on SEEP's earlier work with rural villages. SEEP staff have gone to I-Taukei (indigenous Fijian) villages to listen to the people and identify key challenges they face. For many it is a lack of cash income, while for others it is slow recovery after natural disasters or the threat of damage from mining for gold, copper and other minerals on their lands.

Mai democracy, as SEEP calls it, begins with the community. Drawing on the traditional understanding of the village as the centre of community life, SEEP is committed to training local people with consensus skills to encourage strong village-level democracy. Blending good development practice with traditional ways of decision-making is the hard work of the project.

Inspiration for Go Organic! Grow Organic! comes from work SEEP has already done, especially with women and young people like the women's group in the small rural village of Lutu that came up with a plan to improve their children's success at school.

Children were falling behind and not always bothering to walk the twenty minutes to the neighbouring village to attend school. Wanting the best for their children, the women's group came up with the idea of a community library.

They identified an abandoned house that could be used, and Nai, a young mother, volunteered to be the librarian. Other

mothers also agreed to help. Excited by the project, they spoke to the Bose Vakaro (village meeting) who agreed. They cleaned out the house and assembled books and equipment. Now the children race to the library to do homework, listen to or read stories, or try other activities. Every week the children take a book home to read.

The results were immediate. At the end of last year, many children won prizes and they are all doing better at school. Excited by their success, the women persuaded the Bose Vakaro to support a request to local government to upgrade the building. When the administrator visited, Nai made sure he knew about the library. He agreed to look into improving the building. The women have gained confidence and the Bose Vakaro is more attentive to their voices, knowing the whole village will benefit.

Spreading democracy

Go Organic! Grow Organic! builds on successes like this, to give people opportunities to improve livelihoods, better prepare in case of disaster, and make sound, sustainable decisions about their shared future. SEEP wants villagers to be confident making decisions about their own land and influence the government policies that affect them.

Many are facing tough decisions around gold and sand mining. Communities are divided, and the voices of women and young people are not always heard. Some are more interested in short-term gain than the long-term sustainability of the village where they have been raised.

Under the guidance of SEEP-trained locals, these communities will better understand the science, their rights and the legal processes involved so they can ask questions and make informed decisions.

SEEP has found that setting up separate groups for women and young people is an effective way of improving participation. Finding their own voices and having the confidence to make their views known is an important part of developing a flourishing democracy.

In choosing this year's project, Presbyterian Women and Methodist Women's Fellowship were keen to support the New Zealand's close neighbours and "let the children live". CWS encourages readers to learn more about the Special Project and get behind fundraising efforts. More resources are available on the website or from local members.

– CWS



2019 Operation Refugee

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1930–1999

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