

Spanz

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Autumn 2018, ISSUE 72



Will euthanasia
be legalised?

www.presbyterian.org.nz

What is happening with Northern Presbytery?

Northern Presbytery was established in 2011 from the union of the Church's four northernmost presbyteries.

Over time, there were a range of issues that indicated the establishment of one large presbytery was not fulfilling what was intended, and there were unintended consequences. A review was undertaken, referred to as a strategic realignment, resulting in a proposal that was consulted upon. A new structure was adopted in August 2017.

The main structural changes included:

- The establishment of five regions to further the Northern Presbytery's mission and ministry.
- Each region consists of ministers and elders from each congregation, chaplains, retired ministers and other associated ministries.
- The Presbytery office was restructured to establish two new positions (Executive Officer and Administration Officer); the Youth Coordinator role was not affected.
- The full Presbytery is to meet twice per year and the Presbytery's Council is to meet four times per year.
- The Council consists of ten elected members (two from each region), with voting rights, moderator (casting vote only Standing Orders 1.2), and associated members including immediate past or designate moderator, Executive Officer; workgroup convenor; Treasurer, other Presbytery and national Church staff as appropriate.
- Presbytery workgroups at that stage consisted of: Property and Finance; Mission Fund, and Youth.

The intent of the strategic restructure was to place more emphasis on the regions, and to provide greater opportunities for ministers and elders to work together, regionally. The mantra I am using is: "region-led, Presbytery connected, supported by the Presbytery office".

In the first five months a number of steps have been taken, such as revision of the Property and Finance Workgroup to be more strategic and proactive; establishment of a Conflict Advisory Workgroup, with the purpose of adopting the best process to address a particular dispute or issue; decision to revise the Youth Workgroup, with the aim of increasing the voice of youth and enhancing youth leadership; establishment of a revised Mission Pathways Fund to provide governance over the distribution of Presbytery development funds; and the establishment of a new Learning and Development Workgroup to increase leadership capacity and capability.

To begin to change the focus to regions leading ministry and mission, each region (with the exception of Northland at this stage due to complexities with Churches Together in Northland) has established a strategic plan. This sets the priorities for each region, collectively to work together. These are underpinned by a Presbytery strategic plan, which is close to being finalised. Our mission is to extend trust and relationships by ensuring Presbytery operations are timely, transparent, fair, and outcome focused. One goal is for congregations to trust and gain benefit from the Presbytery.

Based on my 21 years as a senior health/social sector executive I think that appropriately applying characteristics of a mission-driven, high-performing organisation would considerably assist



Dr Rod Watts

Presbytery, including congregations, workgroups and leadership. For example, the Presbytery Council is similar to a Board, with the Convenor similar to the role of Board Chairperson. The Executive Officer role is similar to a Chief Executive, with responsibilities of implementation and being accountable to the Board Chair – in our case to the Council Convenor. Exploring what and how to apply organisation excellence should enable streamlining Presbytery processes and systems; maximize results from activity undertaken, and engender a desired culture. I think my main contribution in serving the Presbytery is to continue to explore how the structures, processes and systems of high-performing mission-driven organisations can contribute to ministry and mission.

– Dr Rod Watt is the Executive Officer of Northern Presbytery.

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MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

The Right Rev Richard Dawson contributes a regular column to *Spanz*.



Why Presbyterian?

In this day and age of declining interest in denominational difference, it is perhaps odd to ponder why I have stayed in the Presbyterian family of the Christian church, but I think it is a worthwhile exercise, especially at a time of year when we contemplate for a moment what investment we shall make in the Church in the coming year.

Let's begin with the most common fallacy – that our commitment isn't in fact to the denomination, but to the local expression of the denomination – to our local church. It simply isn't the case that we either can or do ignore the wider identity of the denomination. The heat of the last 25 years of debate in our Church would not have occurred if all we care about is the local expression of our Church. It is clear that all of us have a real stake in the denominational face of the Church.

So why am I still Presbyterian? As a denomination we're an incredibly eclectic Church. There are five major things that I value highly in a denominational structure, which I think we include in the Presbyterian family well.

- 1 We have a national and international identity.
- 2 We are deeply committed to the ministry and expression of lay people.
- 3 We believe in a flat leadership structure.
- 4 We are deeply committed to the historicity and theological integrity of the biblical scriptures.
- 5 We take the incarnation seriously.

The first value may seem rather insignificant but given that our reach is always determined by our vision it is important to have a sense of scale that is reflective of the reach of the gospel. God's love is for the whole world. The Church's vision needs to reflect this and a national structure goes a long way towards doing this. The national structure acts as a very important corrective to the narrowing influence of the local focus which is proper in its context, but should always be seen for what it is – a very small slice of God's world.

Secondly, we are deeply committed to the ministry of lay people and to the full development of every person regardless of gender or race. We are ruled largely by lay people (lay elders). We give these people equal access to our power structures and we work to involve them at every level of ministry that they wish to be. While this may require constant vigilance and we need to keep asking whether we are keeping the spirit of the belief alive, it is still part of our DNA.

As a part of this we believe in a very flat leadership structure. We do not believe that "big leaders" no matter how talented they are will be the salvation of the Church. Rather we believe that the character and content of believing people is the fruit of God's Spirit moving in our lives – and it is this which will keep us on the straight path. Good leaders are wonderful, but as Israel found out to her peril – bad leaders magnify their mistakes and cast a pall over whole nations. Consequently, we believe in limiting this effect.

We are committed to the word as a living document and an open invitation to meet with the God of our mothers and fathers. This means we commit to studying it in-depth from the standpoint of belief. We do not come to the scriptures sceptically or in a capricious or ambivalent manner. The word interrogates us – not the other way around. Only in this way can we be open to the Spirit's living word today.

Finally we take the incarnation seriously. As the core belief of the Christian faith the incarnation holds all things in balance. It holds the love and judgement of God in one act. It holds the perfection of God and the imperfection of our sin in one person and it holds the finiteness of our life together with the infiniteness of God in Christ's death and resurrection.

The Presbyterian Church has significant flaws which we should work on, but we also have some treasures. I hope you, too, might feel some sense of pride towards our Church because of these things.

God Bless you this year.



PRESBYTERIANS SPEAK OUT ON EUTHANASIA BILL

A bill that would give doctors the legal right to end a person's life is making its way through Parliament.

In January, death came up close and personal for Rev Wayne Te Kaawa, with a call from the hospital. His mother's stroke meant she would not last the day without life support.

"The whanau had to decide on her behalf what to do," he says. "She was 82 and had already told us she didn't want her life prolonged, so we didn't. We let her go."

Withholding treatment in such cases is already legal and uncontroversial, but a bill before Parliament aims to extend the legal boundaries, enabling doctors to intentionally cause a patient's death in certain circumstances.

The End of Life Choice bill had its first reading last December, where 76 MPs voted in favour and 44 against. A Justice Select Committee is now hearing public submissions, including those from Presbyterian and Union churches, and one from the InterChurch Bioethics Council.

Dr Helen Bichan is a Presbyterian member of the Council and has followed the debate closely, since the bill was first tabled in 2013. Public interest was re-ignited two years later by Lecretia Seales' battle in the High Court. The 42-year-old Wellington lawyer advocated strongly for a law change during her terminal illness with brain cancer.

Almost 9,000 New Zealanders signed a petition supporting her in what they saw as the right to a dignified death, yet a Health Select Committee report on public attitudes to euthanasia, presented to Parliament in August last year, found that 80 percent of the 21,000 submissions were opposed to a change in legislation.

Helen says that public discussion about euthanasia is being confused by unclear definitions of the proposed legislation. A dignified death is already possible.

"The debate is not about whether an individual should be able to end their own life. Suicide isn't a crime," she explains. "And it's confusing to talk about physician-assisted dying when doctors are already involved in palliative care and supporting patient

choice and dignity. The debate is about whether the State should condone and facilitate the suicides of some of its citizens. Very few people fully understand the issues involved in taking that step, and the risks."

Helen adds that euthanasia puts doctors in an invidious position. "Why should physicians be asked to assist with suicide when that's not part of their training or their medical ethics? International experience shows that doctors in countries where it has been legalised are becoming either desensitised or traumatised by the experience."

The New Zealand Medical Association's position is that physician-assisted suicide is unethical, even if legalised. Yet, the Association – although influential – represents fewer than 20 percent of the country's 14,000 doctors and hasn't polled its members.² In Australia, neurosurgeon Brian Owler played a vital role in the landmark decision of the state of Victoria to legalise euthanasia last November 2017. His strong advocacy was informed by the personal experience of seeing his father "die a terrible death".

Rev Sandra Wright-Taylor is a chaplain at Burwood Hospital in Canterbury. The hospital specialises in the care of older people.

"It may be that some of the doctors here will struggle as it doesn't fit with their medical ethics," she reflects. "Others say, yes we can see this working."

She has also witnessed a loved one die of a terminal illness. Her husband's struggle with cancer informs her guidance on end-of-life issues.

"Every day was a real effort for him. It was pretty terrible," she says. "We attended an advanced group at the Cancer Society where we always talked about living well. About what that meant. But my husband would say that people should have the choice, and I personally have no problem with changing the legislation for those who need it."

Sandra says that when Lucretia's case was in the media it provoked discussion among her clients in Burwood, and some fear.



"I sit with patients who are frightened they'll be pressured by their families to make a decision they don't want to make," she reflects. "I often hear on the wards, 'I do what the children want as it's just easier', or 'I don't want to be a bother'."

Studies show that 75 percent of elder abuse is carried out by family members. "Coercion is often undetectable," says Helen. "The right to die would become a duty to die, for many, because death would be cheaper than care and treatment."

Rhee Barry is an elder of the Korean Church in Auckland. Korean culture, she explains, is still strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy.

"Korean Christians value of life and their worldviews are grounded in Confucianism, especially death is important as people live through their next generations even after death. Therefore, elders 'dying well' is connected to next generation's prosperity of 'living well'."

Rhee says her personal belief is that life and death are in God's hands, and a law change would be troubling.

"I'm concerned that elderly, disabled and depressed people will be pressured to finish their lives, sometimes by doctors or family members but continually by their fear of being a burden to someone else. Having to advise someone feels challenging and I pray to God I won't be in that position in future."

Pacific Islands Synod moderator Rev Karima Fai'ai says the issue isn't widely discussed in Pacific circles, with most people defaulting to the generally orthodox Christian conservative view of not supporting euthanasia.

"For me personally, I'm in the middle on the debate. I think it needs to be for special cases only, if someone is in a long term vegetative state, and with everybody affected being consulted," he believes. "We also need clear boundary lines about doctors' powers and doctors themselves need to be protected, from prosecution for example."

Helen points out that the bill is being championed by one of the most privileged individuals in our society, the lone Act MP

David Seymour, yet it potentially impacts the most vulnerable groups. Our already high suicide rate increased again in 2016/17, to 606 suicides. Life expectancy and the numbers of very elderly continues to climb. These factors, plus under-resourcing of mental health and of hospices, increasing poverty, and social attitudes to people with disabilities all put New Zealanders at risk, she says.

"The bill encompasses not only the terminally ill but also those with a 'grievous and irremediable medical condition', which is self-determined," Helen explains. "This allows for assisted suicide on demand for any condition and undermines the general suicide prevention message. Depression is often poorly diagnosed and is potentially treatable. It's responsible for the high suicide rate among men of working age, in our farming communities especially."

In 2013, in the Netherlands, 42 people with severe psychiatric problems were killed by lethal injection, which represented a 150 percent increase in seven years. One of the safeguards built into the New Zealand legislation is for two doctors to agree that assisted dying is warranted.

"Neither doctor may know the patient sufficiently well to determine if they are depressed or being coerced," counters Helen.

The Nathaniel Centre, the Catholic Bioethics Centre, says that at the heart of arguments in favour of euthanasia is a belief that some lives are not worth living. It points out that terminal illnesses and disability are often feared more by those anticipating them than those living with them.

Palliative care is largely delivered by hospices, which are community rather than government funded. The Mary Potter Hospice in Wellington was New Zealand's first hospice, established in 1978 by Catholic nuns, and where Lecretia Seales died. Director Dr Brian Ensor has spent 25 years working in the sector and says hospices are unlikely to be involved in the practical provision of assisted dying, as it is outside the scope of palliative care.



“Our ethic is to neither hasten death nor prolong life,” he says. “I think New Zealand is already good at recognising people’s rights to limit and withhold treatment in terminal illnesses. There’s not much evidence that life is being over-prolonged. Where it does occasionally occur, the problem is with communication of people’s wishes. The protocol in hospitals is to treat first and ask questions later.”

The bill represents a clash of two important values: the respect for individual autonomy and the respect for life. Ahead of the first reading in Parliament, Attorney-General Chris Finlayson assessed the proposed legislation as being consistent with the fundamental rights and freedoms of New Zealanders. Brian says that hospice philosophy is life-affirming in that it acknowledges the emotional, spiritual and social needs of patients and whānau. A collective approach to a person’s dying acknowledges that people are interconnected.

“The bill is driven mostly by concerns about autonomy and control, but individual autonomy is a bit overrated, and not the only view we can take,” he says. “The bill also medicalises death, bringing it into the medical rather than the existential or spiritual sphere.”

Rev Wayne Te Kaawa is a trained nurse and has also worked in palliative care. He says the Māori view also acknowledges the collective, that every individual is embedded in a set of relations.

“I remember a story from the old days of a guy in his eighties who told his hapu, ‘I’m taking the waka out to sea and I’m not coming back.’ They gave him their blessing. That was the traditional way.”

The bill’s first reading received strong initial support from Māori MPs and has since generated debate on tikanga (customs) around death, how euthanasia might fit with Māori values.

“Tikanga evolve,” says Wayne. “Māori are generally more open to talking about death and dying and we need to be having these discussions because what’s being proposed is about more than not preventing someone from going when it’s their time.”

Brian agrees that the complexities of the issue proscribe easy answers. “In my experience, a handful of people exists who I think this legislation might be appropriate for. Legislation is difficult to construct and the bill is rightly conservative, as we have no direct experience of how it might work out in practice.

We get contradictory stories from other countries. What I can say is that once laws are established and normalised they inevitably broaden. In that sense, this proposed legislation is a big decision for a country to take.”

The most significant risk, says Brian, is for people who feel they’re a drain on the system or their families. He sees the Church having a role in emphasising the value of all life.

“You don’t have to be holding a paid job to be worthy of respect. We need to be embodying that value, not just talking about the sanctity of life.”

Helen agrees. “As Christians we understand that choices are not made in a vacuum. Being in relationship is part of being human. For any person wanting to end their life there is a matrix of other people involved – friends, family, professionals and society. We need to be asking, who is helped and who is harmed by decisions? And what sort of society do we want – an individualistic one like America or do we use the Kiwi values of fairness and respect?”

MPs were asked to paddle their own waka at the first reading, voting by conscience rather than by party. Many voted for further discussion, undecided if the bill should be enacted. The InterChurch Bioethics Council will continue to urge Parliament to vote against a bill that Helen says comes down to the rights and privileges of a handful of dying people whose pain can’t be alleviated by palliative care, against the risks to vulnerable groups of society, whose numbers are rapidly increasing.

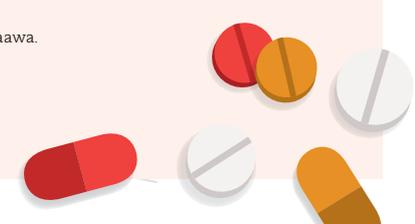
“We chose to finally abolish capital punishment in 1989 because of the finality of death and the potential for a miscarriage of justice,” she adds. “Why would we go backwards and introduce a new law that carries the same risk, and force doctors into the role of executioners?”

The End of Life Choice bill will return to Parliament for its second reading later this year. A third reading and Royal Assent are required for it to be enacted. Some MPs have made their continued support of the bill conditional on a binding public referendum.

Jade Reidy Spanz

¹ Former Te Aka Puaho moderator Millie Te Kaawa.

² www.noted.co.nz/currently/social-issues/who-speaks-for-doctors-on-euthanasia/





Children from Telskuf, Iraq, in their school bus bought through fundraising led by Katherine Dobie of Knox Presbyterian, Lower Hutt.

Parishioner helps get Iraqi children to school

Knox Presbyterian Lower Hutt parishioners and the local community joined forces for a unique mission for children in Iraq.

When Katherine Dobie decided to raise \$35,000 to buy a bus so that children in a recently liberated Iraqi village could travel to school, she turned for help to her fellow parishioners at Knox Presbyterian Church, Lower Hutt.

Katherine worked on the project through a Christian organisation called Pre-emptive Love. "Their name spoke to me: going out and loving, not responding but pre-empting, choosing the love of Christ before anyone has asked you.

"I read an article on their Facebook page about the persecution the children in Mosul had gone through when in the hands of ISIS, and the way the Christian church is now rebuilding, coming back stronger than ever. Pre-emptive Love is supporting people by investing for the future, helping them create businesses as well as providing emergency relief.

"One article was about need for school buses for a town near Mosul called Telskuf. People wanted to move back there after liberation from ISIS, but the children could not go to school as the buildings were too badly damaged, so they would not go.

"It was on my mind, and I prayed about it a lot. I decided to donate money for buses so that families could move back to the village and the children could travel to school in town. Then I thought, Why not raise enough to buy a bus? It felt as if God was pushing me: let's go all out and get the money for a whole bus rather than send money towards one.

"I saw it as a way we could connect with Iraqi people in the wake of ISIS. I had heard people asking, 'How can we help?' I saw the bus as a gift from Lower Hutt and the surrounding area."

Katherine, who was only 24 when she set out on her mission, contacted Pre-emptive Love and was told that providing a bus would cost \$35,000. "Then they came back and said they needed the money in a month – or they would have to take it out of funds intended for other projects. That meant raising about \$1000 a day. I prayed about it and decided to push on.

"The elders let me speak in services, and I read out the latest articles about how Christianity was rebuilding in the area. People were grateful for that education because the mainstream news does not give that kind of understanding."

She opened a Give a Little page. At her gym, the instructors held special classes and put a bucket at the reception desk. Lighthouse Cinemas had a fundraising movie night and her old school, St Oran's College, a mufti day. "People caught the passion. They could see what I could see," says Katherine. Her local MP, Chris Bishop posted about it on his Facebook page.

Katherine grew up in Lower Hutt and has attended Knox Presbyterian Church since she was a small child. "It has been a great support through my life."

At high school, she coordinated the 40 Hour Famine. "I've always been interested in showing the love of Christ in practical ways and in fighting injustice."

Katherine works for Sky Sport in live sports broadcasts – "making sure the cameras are working and that we are on air."

"I enjoy working in television but I have passion and heart for changing the world, so I listen to where God wants to lead me and take opportunities.

"The thing that got me excited about this project is that it was a tangible object that we could all work towards rather than just chucking money in a fund.

"In the end we were sent pictures of children holding up signs saying, 'A gift from the city of Lower Hutt' and a video of the bus, packed full of kids. They just needed a hand up from people in a country that is very blessed.

"It shows you don't have to be overseas to be part of mission work," says Katherine.

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)

PASIFIKA YOUTH TAKE HOME MADE MEALS TO THE STREETS

Onehunga Co-operating Parish youth group have found that service to the needy, gifted by young people in a heartfelt and non-judgmental way, has the power to transform both parties.

Last year, 36 members of the parish's youth group took part in a community initiative that saw 100 plates of food distributed to those in need.

Youth group members purchased food with their own money, cooked and transported the food themselves to homeless people living rough in both Auckland city centre and South Auckland. The idea was theirs and the input all theirs – not a cent had to be raised.

Last year was the initiative's third year. It was also the first time the youth group took hospitality to South Auckland, and while the 100 plates of food were gratefully received by those living on the streets, it was nowhere near enough.

Youth group leader Robert Harris says the need is increasing all the time, most noticeably among those communities served by the parish.

"Generally, there has always been a need to help the homeless in central Auckland, but it's now becoming more obvious in our own communities around South Auckland. It's closer to home. It strikes a real chord with our members.

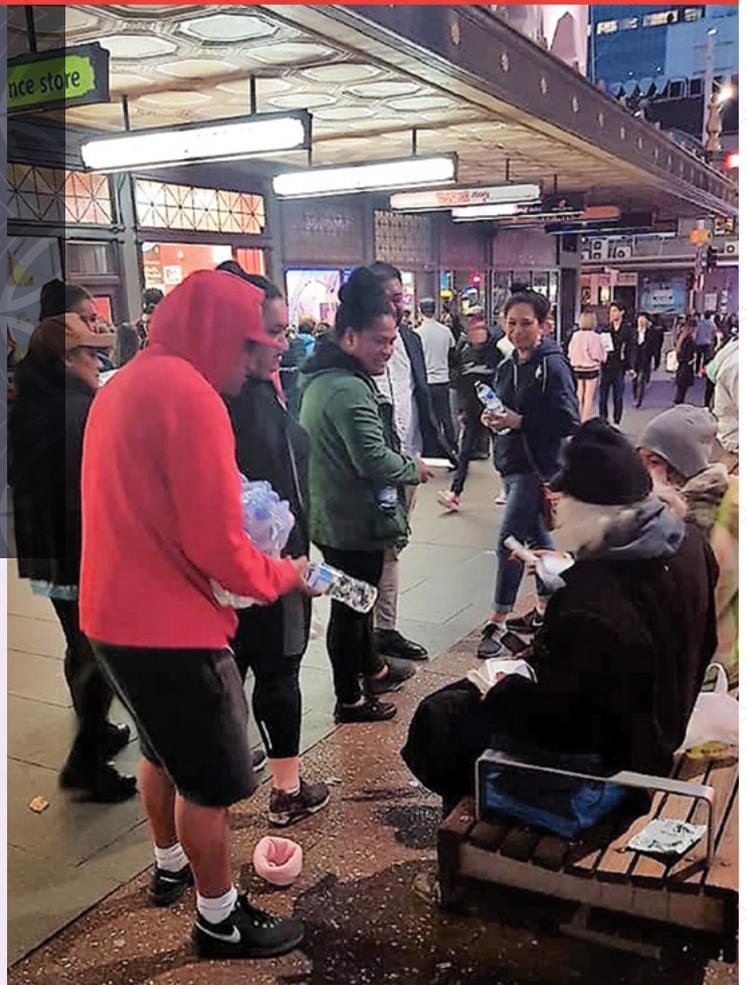
"Many of our youth come from large families; they understand hardship more than many other communities."

The youth group came up with the idea when looking for a faith-based community project that would bind them together in a practical form of service to those in need. It has since grown in leaps and bounds, so much so that when Robert announces the date on which the next food initiative is to be held, he says his numbers "skyrocket".

"They are that supportive," he says with pride, "and most often, it's those who have the least to give, who give the most. I just say we're doing it on such and such a day and they all rush to be involved. Our youth group members prepare the food at home and bring it to the church. We sort it there and then distribute it.

"I'm lucky in that I work for a transport company, so I can get the use of a couple of vans. Last year, we split into two groups of around 15 to 20 each. I try to make sure that each of our members gets a chance to personally hand over the food to someone in need - it's good for them to have that one-on-one contact with people they are helping."

In 2017, one group went into Auckland central while another distributed to areas in South Auckland, including Onehunga, Mangere East, Otahuhu and Manurewa.



Onehunga Co-operating Church's youth group offered food they bought and prepared, and drinks, to the homeless on Auckland's Queen Street.

Those on the receiving end are deeply grateful, Robert says. "Some do volunteer information on why they are there, others choose to say very little, often out of embarrassment, but they're all glad of the help."

Supporting the youth group initiative all the way is Onehunga Co-operating Parish minister, Rev Fakaofu Kaio. His heart swells with pride at the fact that the idea came from his parish's youth themselves, and that they turned down his offer to finance it through church funds.

"They wanted to give their own money, to make it their own. Ours is a multicultural community made up of several denominations, but at its heart is worship," he says. "Most of the youth group are Cook Islanders. I said to them from the start that there is no need for them to evangelise or preach through this initiative – it should simply be an initiative of love and care, and it is.

"It is wonderful to see our youth doing this, without judging those they are helping. You should see them afterwards, they are on a natural high."

Information from the communities themselves, and the world of social media, identifies areas of need each year, and measures are taken to ensure the safety of youth group members as they distribute the food.

Fakaofu sees the initiative as a "blossoming" within his church. "You can preach the word as much as you like. That is just part of it. But when I see something like this coming from the youth, it warms my heart."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



Minister takes faith, kai to South Auckland

The funds for the hot meals and food parcels that Rev Mahaki Albert took to people on the streets of Manurewa and Papakura was “coming from my family, from my wife and two kids, so I had a limit of \$100”.

Seeing children as young as one year old living on the streets in the cold and rain, who haven't eaten for days, and sharing one jersey can be heartbreaking, says Rev Mahaki Albert of Te Aka Puaho's Tamaki Makaurau Maori pastorate.

Mahaki should know: every Thursday night for the last eight months, after he has finished his day job as a Cultural Adviser with the Counties Manukua DHB, he loads up his van with soup he's cooked himself and bread he's paid for, and drives around Manurewa and Papakura delivering a hot meal along with the word of God.

He started this ministry shortly after being ordained as an amorangi minister in April 2017. “I knew our young people weren't coming to church but I wanted to work with them in my ministry,” says the father of two young children. “I wanted to grow a community that understood the word of God and I saw a real need for this among South Auckland's homeless, its prostitutes and transvestites. I have a real passion for people in a marginalised situation,” he adds, which comes from his socially-minded Gisborne upbringing where “everyone was welcome”.

Mahaki picked Thursday because it's the only evening he has free (he teaches Te Reo three nights a week) and at first thought he would simply read the Bible aloud to whoever was around. “Some of them thought I was recently released

from the local mental health service,” he jokes. But a few weeks into his Thursday night mission he began to see the need for more practical help.

“I saw people who hadn't eaten for days, including kids. I wondered how we'd gotten like this in New Zealand, if we had any compassion for such people, because so many Kiwis just look the other way.”

He gained permission from Whare Tiaki Hauora Ltd, a mental health NGO of which he is chairman, to use their commercial kitchen. Every Thursday, he cleared his own fridge of leftover meat from the Sunday roast and anything else he could find to brew up a pot of soup. He'd take that, along with loaves of buttered bread, for those on the street.

Mahaki quickly gained people's trust and says they would look forward to his Thursday night visits.

“The money was coming from my family, from my wife and two kids, so I had a limit of \$100. But most weeks I would spend about \$70 and the rest on things like nappies or food parcels or whatever else people needed.”

Mahaki got to know the people well and says most were receptive to receiving “some kai and a prayer”. His assistance extended to helping a family move from living under a railway underpass to short-term accommodation.

“They had two kids, including a one-year-old, and had been living with their

father in a Housing NZ flat. But he passed away and 72 hours after they buried him, Housing NZ asked them to vacate the house as they didn't qualify for it,” Mahaki says.

It took three months of wangling with social services to get them into accommodation and onto benefits, he says.

“There is so much need out there, I was grateful to be able to help them in their horrendous situation.”

For Mahaki, his Thursday night soup and prayer ministry is also a way of building a support network around him. “It can be lonely being a minister and doing this ministry on my own. My church is made up of elderly people so it isn't appropriate for them to be out on the streets of South Auckland at 10pm! But they have helped whenever I've asked for resources, such as blankets and pillows.”

Mahaki is keen to continue this work in 2018; he is planning to meet with his church to discuss next steps.

“We'd like to get some sponsorship or donations to help us keep going this year,” he says. “Doing this kind of work brings immense fulfillment for me and I really want to keep it going. I may not be growing the Church in terms of numbers but I have one of the largest churches in the country – the marginalised people of the streets of South Auckland!”

Sharon Stephenson Spanz

Free Christmas event for deserving families



The Maireroa family were among the 700 children who enjoyed a range of free treats at the Christmas Store playground.

Christmas Store 2017, an annual demonstration of pastoral nurturing supported by Auckland's St Columba Presbyterian Church, perfectly captured the season's spirit of generosity.

On December 23 2017, 160 families and 700 children received gifts of food, household goods, groceries and presents at the Glen Innes School venue which hosted the event.

Each child received a present, and youngsters spent time in the play area enjoying face-painting, bouncy castles, popcorn and candy floss, special treats from Cafe2U and ice-creams from Mr Whippy.

Recognising that the donations far exceeded anything else they may have received throughout the year, Christmas Store 2017 elicited a heartfelt response from those who received.

Steve Farrelly, an elder at St Columba Presbyterian, is the founder and general manager of Breakfast Club, a community outreach of Zion Ministries Trust, supported by St Columba Presbyterian in Botany. The annual Christmas Store initiative grew out of that club some three years ago, evolving from an annual banquet for about 600 people.

Steve describes the feedback from the families at Christmas Store 2017 as "very emotional".

"Many of the families struggle to come to terms with everything being free, donated by complete strangers. They are used to 'food donations' but nothing like what they received on that day," Steve says. "The children were cautious at first as they also struggled to accept that everything was free, and the volunteers found the whole event quite emotional."

There is much about the Christmas Store that makes it special. A massive effort goes into fundraising beforehand, and the event involves many months of hard work, spearheaded by Steve and his crew.

A total of \$20,000 was raised for Christmas Store 2017. About half of that came from the St Columba congregation and the rest from those who had supported the 2016 event, many of whom chose to increase their donations from the previous year.

As fundraising got underway, school principals and social workers worked to identify families in need. This year, 160 families were

invited to participate, drawn from Glen Innes School, Glen Taylor School, St Pius X School, Tamaki Primary School, Te Kohanga School, Leabank Primary and Vaka Tautua Charity.

Everything on the day was offered 'free of charge' and help was provided by a team of 50 volunteers, 12 of them from St Columba.

Steve says the volunteers help run the various food and grocery stands inside the hall. Purchased for the 2017 stalls were items such as corned beef cans, frozen vegetables, cans of coconut cream, vermicelli, oyster sauce, 160 legs of lamb, watermelon, ice cream, hot dogs and sweets. Among the items donated were cereals, food bank groceries, potatoes and onions, dessert hampers, toiletries, baby items, toys, a range of sweets and 200 Christmas hampers, for which Christmas Store had paid a koha.

The families were given a choice of what they wanted.

Steve says social workers remained with the families while they chose goods, as many found being given about \$500 worth of items for free quite emotional.

"That is why the last stand was watermelon and Tip Top vanilla, they could eat and relax prior to going outside with the children."

Event organisers also make sure as many people as possible are assisted through Christmas Store, and go to some lengths to ensure no-one feels left out on the day.

"Every hour only one of the schools attended, so the children were amongst friends, as were the parents," Steve explains. "Some families rang the school principals about 'missing out', and in all of those cases we found a spot for them."

As the popularity of Christmas Store grows, so are plans to increase the scale of the event each year. Steve says three additional schools were added in 2017, and the number of families invited from Glen Innes and Glen Taylor went from 20 to 30.

"It is not necessarily that the need has grown, rather than our ability to service the need has increased.

"In 2018, we intend increasing the families attending to 200, and the number of children to 1000. We are expecting to have to raise \$27,000 to do that."

Viv Posselt **Spanz**

Unesco recognises Presbyterian Research Centre's Chinese collection

In November last year, the Presbyterian Research Centre's Ng New Zealand Chinese Heritage Collection received the honour of being listed on UNESCO's New Zealand documentary heritage register.

Dr James Ng of Dunedin has spent six decades collecting material about Chinese people in New Zealand, starting as a medical student in the late 1950s.

He has gifted the collection to the Presbyterian Research Centre (PRC) at Knox College in Dunedin, and it is being moved there as he and his wife Eva "downsize".

While setting up a trust to manage the collection, the centre's director, Jane Thomsen, saw that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was calling for expressions of interest for its Memory of the World documentary heritage register. She got in touch and UNESCO invited her to a workshop on making an application.

The Ng New Zealand Chinese Heritage Collection was chosen as one of seven collections for the New Zealand register in 2017, joining about 20 already listed.

The collection includes material on the Chinese Missions to Canton or Guangzhou, as well as Dr Ng's material. Most of the Chinese people who came to New Zealand from the late 1860s were from Guangdong province.

Dr Ng, who came to New Zealand as a small child, became the session clerk of what is now the Dunedin Chinese Presbyterian Church in 1984. The church was started in 1898 by long-term Chinese missionary Rev Alexander Don, whose surviving diaries are in the Ng collection.

Dr Ng started collecting material in 1958 when he and fellow fifth-year medical student Jack Fraser did a thesis

on the blood pressure of Chinese New Zealanders. "We found their blood pressure was half-way between that of Cantonese people in China and New Zealanders of European background. It was my part of the thesis to examine the history of the Chinese in New Zealand. I did that, and just kept on researching.

"One of the major sources of writings on the New Zealand Chinese were the Presbyterian records. The Presbyterian Church Synod of Otago and Southland formed a Chinese Mission to take the Christian message to the Chinese gold miners. There were about 4000 Chinese gold miners here in 1871. They had been invited by the Otago Provincial Council to come from Victoria because the main gold rush was over and number of gold rushers had fallen from some 20,000 in 1861-64 to about 6000.

"The European gold rushers had gone over the gold fields but there was still plenty of gold left and second-grade gold-bearing ground. The first time the Chinese miners were invited, they said they would come if the provincial government received the same laws and security as others received. The provincial council agreed and the first two parties came in late 1865," says Dr Ng.

While the Presbyterian archives had the material from the Chinese Villages Mission to Canton and the Chinese Mission in Otago and Southland, Dr Ng collected data on the gold miners and their descendants – while working as a medical doctor.



Historian Dr James Ng and his wife Eva look at a diary from the Ng New Zealand Chinese Heritage Collection they have gifted to the Presbyterian Research Centre in Dunedin. Photo: Otago Daily Times.

Former Presbyterian Research Centre archivist Yvonne Wilkie and Dr Ng are friends. Says Dr Ng, "There were a lot of burglaries of doctors' surgeries and mine was in my home. So I put the most valuable parts of my collection under her care."

Dr Ng's grandfather started a laundry in Gore, which his father later worked in. His grandfather had been naturalised in 1908, so his father was able to bring his mother and the children out in 1941.

Dr Ng and Eva are delighted to send the collection to the archive. "After collecting all this stuff, which is filling up our house, it's wonderful to have it taken care of in its entirety and valued for the future. It will be accessible for others as the centre will catalogue and digitise the material." Funding from the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust has paid for shelving at the centre.

The UNESCO listing increases the likelihood of funding from national bodies. "It shows that little organisations can compete with large museums and research libraries," says Jane Thomsen.

While Dr Ng's research is carried on by James Beattie of Victoria University and others, the Presbyterian Research Centre is applying to have the Chinese Missions Collection included in the Asia Pacific section of the Memory of the World register, having been invited to do so by UNESCO.

Jane Tolerton [Spanz](#)



The Auckland Taiwanese Presbyterian Church's choir performed at their church's opening service in December 2017.

After 27 years Taiwanese church has own home

The Auckland Taiwanese Presbyterian Church (ATPC) opened the doors of its new purpose built building in December.

The church in Pakuranga was officially opened on Sunday, 3 December by the Church's Moderator Right Rev Richard Dawson as part of an opening service of thanksgiving.

Over 200 people packed the main chapel, including guests from the church's sister church in Taiwan.

"The pastor and his wife brought eight people to the opening," says Rev Mark Wen, who has served as the Taiwanese Church's minister since 2010. "They were impressed, and we are also very happy with our new home, where we have first priority of use."

Northern Presbytery moderator Rev Wayne Toleafoa delivered a sermon on faith and generosity. "Birds of all kinds make their homes in the Christian church's branches," he said. "There is a place in the generous branches of the kingdom of heaven for people of all kinds."

The Auckland Taiwanese Presbyterian Church began in 1990 with eight families. For the past 27 years the church has been using St Andrew's Presbyterian in Howick for services and other activities, says Mark.

"We're so thankful to St Andrew's ministers over the years who supported us so generously until we could get financially independent. For example, our minister lived at the pastor's house rent free and his salary was partially covered, and we paid no rental fee while building."

For his support from the beginning, the Rev Dr Stuart Vogel has been made an honorary pastor of the church.

The single-story ATPC building is adjacent to Saint Kentigern's College in Pakuranga Road.

"The design is strong and clean," says Mark. "Our designer, a local Baptist church minister, gave us this design for free and also helped us to select a Kiwi builder."

Members of the Korean Presbyterian Church of Auckland were also invited to the opening, as the two churches share a close relationship. Refreshments were provided by the congregation and local shops. Those who hadn't attended the ATPC music concert the previous evening had an opportunity to wander through the building.

The concert, according to Mark, was one of many miracles associated with the project.

"Right up to the last day we were still waiting on official council permission to use the music hall. We prayed hard, because all the invitations had gone out."

The new church has had a long gestation. The building fund was kicked off 17 years ago with a \$100,000 donation from a congregation member. The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan contributed along the way and someone else offered land for sale.

"The land owner was very patient with us," says Mark. "He could have sold it for a higher price but he wanted us to have it, so he waited while we discussed the complexities of where and how to build. Another miracle."

Timing is everything, says Mark, whose arrival eight years ago gave the impetus to action.

"When I came to New Zealand from Japan with my wife and son, they had enough money for the foundations but felt the project was too difficult," says Mark. "God has his own time. I could bring fresh enthusiasm."

Construction began in 2014, with a price tag of twice the initial plan due to new building regulations. Although the original planned second story was shelved, the design still allows for later expansion upwards as the church grows. The additional money required was borrowed and will be repaid over 10 years.

In the midst of the project, Mark's four-year visa was due to run out. Miracles continued, with Mark, then 66 years old, being granted a further four years.

"The deputy Immigration Minister personally considered my case to be accepted as a religious person. So fortunate," Mark explains.

The church's 250-strong congregation has a new minister, as Mark officially retired on 31 December. Already up and running in the new church building are daily Mandarin classes, a choir, a youth group and a women's group. Prayer meetings are held on Friday evenings and the church hopes to do outreach work in the community, particularly through language classes.

Jade Reidy [Spanz](#)



Children's Commissioner talks church and career

When Andrew Becroft attended Ratana Church's annual celebrations in January the Children's Commissioner experienced a homecoming.

As a committed Christian whose first appointment to the bench was the Whanganui District Court in 1996, Andrew says the city and its people have a special place in his heart. "I was judicially born and nurtured a judge there."

Whanganui is also where Andrew realised that the most troubled teenagers weren't just naughty; the youth court was dealing with the most marginalised and alienated young people in the country. Too many of them were Māori.

"Most New Zealanders don't know how terrible it really is at the bad end," he says. "While 70 percent of children are doing well, 20 percent struggle and 10 percent are doing so badly it's deeply concerning."

Legislation he is satisfied to have helped achieve is for 17-year-olds to be dealt with in the youth justice system. "We were so out of step with international practice," he asserts.

Andrew was appointed as Children's Commissioner in June 2016 for two years. The independent Crown entity he heads has 18 full-time equivalent staff stretched across a range of advocacy and monitoring tasks on behalf of the country's 1.12 million children. They monitor the wellbeing of young people in the Government's nine youth prisons and care and protection homes, deal annually with around 800 requests for advice on children's rights, consult on new policy, and advocate for

children's voices to be more audible and respected in public debates on issues.

"Children always add quality to the debate," he says, "and the UN Convention includes a strong right to be heard."

Poverty is a key indicator for the bottom 10 percent, and a focus of the new government. Included in its 'first 100 days' was a Families' Package, worth over \$5.5 billion, and legislation to halve child poverty in 10 years, a measurable target Andrew has strongly advocated for. (The government will also launch a Royal Commission into historical state care abuse).

"I've always maintained it's disingenuous to say we can't measure child poverty. We can."

Churches, he says can make a practical difference through foodbanks and op shops, but the biggest impact comes from breaking down the social barriers attached to poverty and disadvantage.

"Churches have long played a role in connecting communities and this is more relevant than ever."

The challenge for churches, he says is to be intergenerational. "There's been too much splitting kids off into separate activities. I think we need Sunday family services at least once a month. We need to be creative and proactive. Society will be all the better for it."

Before being appointed a judge, in 1986 Andrew moved to Mangere in South Auckland with his wife Philippa, to help set up a community law service. There were no legal services available for a community of 48,000. He was supported in

that decision by his Presbyterian Church, St Columba, where he was a 'young' elder.

"My time at St Columba was pivotal, transitioning from being a university student into a lawyer."

He quotes CS Lewis, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because *by it I see everything else.*" I like that perspective."

Andrew's parents, still active members of St Columba, were also highly influential in their son's career path. Andrew was born in Kuala Lumpur, where his father worked as an engineer and his parents volunteered at the Scripture Union on weekends. His father went on to become national director of the Union in New Zealand for 20 years.

Andrew chairs the Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship. Christians, he says, "don't have a mortgage on compassion and empathy, yet I find people respect you for having a value system, for embodying it. As a society I think we've become pluralistic rather than secular but we're not comfortable talking openly about spirituality."

Looking at his life, he says it reveals God's providential hand.

"Jesus prioritised children – 'Permit the *children* to come to me; do not hinder them'; it was a revolutionary approach at the time. God has given me this opportunity today as Children's Commissioner to ensure our children are properly valued. It's a privilege and a huge responsibility."

Jade Reidy [Spanz](#)



Pasifika women's workshop challenges white male leadership



From left, Mevia Faletose and Edna Soli attended a CWM workshop in Fiji aimed at developing young Pasifika women's capacity to creatively resist patriarchy in church context and community.

A five-day workshop for young Pacific Christian women sparked the interest of two Samoan Presbyterians.

Mevia Faletose and Edna Soli were selected by the Presbyterian Church for the Council for World Mission (CWM) all-expenses paid workshop in Fiji.

The council is a worldwide partnership of Christian churches, including the Presbyterian Church. One of its tenets is that patriarchy is the primary obstacle to freedom and equality in church and society. The workshop was designed to develop young Pasifika women's capacity to creatively resist patriarchy and contribute to constructive alternatives.

Mevia is a youth leader at Auckland's PIPC Newton Church. "The workshop brief resonated with me as the kinds of dialogues we don't have in our Church. It was pretty enlightening of the CWM to offer this kind of platform for young Pasifika women to share."

Edna was in the process of moving from Christchurch to Dunedin when she found out about the workshop. As a social worker she was an ideal candidate, and became one of four Presbyterians at the 20-strong workshop from member churches in Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, New Zealand, Maohi Nui (Tahiti) and Nauru.

"The beauty of being able to talk in a faith setting," explains Edna, "was to understand how theologians' descriptions of women as second-class citizens with prescribed social roles still affect the teachings in today's ministries. It smacked me in the face why theology still favours white male leadership.

I've always challenged the role of women but I still got mad all over again."

The main churches in Samoa are Methodist and Samoan Congregational. "No women are allowed to become ministers in those churches. It's a norm," says Edna. "So, at the workshop we had common experiences but in different contexts."

Although domestic violence is a shared experience in Pacific communities, both Edna and Mevia agree that their churches are silent on the issue and don't offer any support. Resistance still exists to addressing women's issues.

"It comes with the territory," Mevia believes. "There's no platform in our church to speak on women. It's seen as not an appropriate place to bring up culturally sensitive issues."

"That's one of the reasons why we need to encourage young Pacific women to become leaders," adds Edna, "because we need to change those mind-sets."

A range of tools and methods was offered by the three facilitators.

"The stand-out for me was the social analysis model that helped us evaluate the context we live in and identify root causes of conflicts in a respectful and positive way," says Mevia.

Practical ways to implement change at home were discussed.

"One of the key ways is to approach core support groups in the community, like for gender-based violence," Mevia explains. They can further educate me and I can take that learning back into my church, and be the linking person."

The first challenge came while still in Fiji. The South Pacific Pageant was also being held at the hotel venue, and because of a double-booking the workshop participants were asked to give up their room for a two-hours press conference.

"We discussed it," says Edna, "and although it was a beauty pageant, they're young women too, so we said yes." This selfless gesture gave the participants their only chance to see Fiji in what was otherwise a packed schedule from 7.30am until dinner.

The workshop material was condensed from a four-week course to fit into five days.

"They had to move fast," says Mevia. "Some of the topics were so enriching we needed more time on them. It's great to take away a USB with all the Powerpoint slides and talks."

The day after Edna arrived back from the workshop she packed up her life in Christchurch, having left her job as a social worker at the Canterbury DHB for a new calling in Dunedin, supporting Pacific health science students at Otago University.

Mevia says her role model is her late grandmother. "She was a very strong woman who immigrated here and made our lives possible here. Mum also supports and stands by me."

Her message to all young Pacific women is to overcome taboos about education and seize opportunities. "Even if you don't think you'll be chosen, just go for it. Try."

Jade Reidy Spanz

COOK ISLANDS MAORI BIBLE NOW AVAILABLE ON PHONE APP



Rev Robert Robati-Mani with wife Marina at the launch of the digitised Cook Island Maori Bible at Takamoa Theological College, Rarotonga in December 2017. Photo: Cook Islands News. Cook Islands.

It was a flash of divine inspiration that kick-started the digitisation of the Cook Islands Maori language Bible, says the man behind the six-year project, Rev Robert Robati-Mani, minister of the Cook Islands Presbyterian Church, Wellington.

“I was considering a topic for study leave when it occurred to me that if I could do my daily devotional readings of the scriptures in English via my mobile device, then why couldn’t I do the same in my mother tongue?”

That was back in 2011 and shortly after that revelation, Robert began making connections with the South Pacific United Bible Society and other ministers and churches to digitise the printed Cook Islands Maori Bible, 3rd edition, 1888 (ie the 1885 version of the King James Bible).

“We had to manually type the entire Bible using native speakers in New Zealand, Rarotonga and Australia,” says Robert of the massive undertaking. “I found volunteers by word of mouth and in 2013, while in Rarotonga on study leave, I worked with the Takamoa Theological College whose students volunteered to help.”

After the data was collated, the work then had to be coordinated and proof-read three times over. “It was a big job,” admits Robert.

The work was funded through Robert’s study leave and by generous donations, from the Cook Islands Christian Church in Rarotonga, other Presbyterian Pacific island parishes in Aotearoa, as well as from various family and friends.

Six years after Robert was first inspired to start the project with his wife Marina, the project was finally completed in July last year. The digitised version is available as a free app on any mobile device. It was officially launched on 14 December 2017, when Robert, Marina, their four children and 20 members of the Wellington Cook Islands Presbyterian Church travelled to Rarotonga for the event.

The launch was held at the Takamoa Theological College in a service where the congregation was encouraged to leave their mobile phones on so they could access the digitised version.

Robert admits the project was a labour of love that was “absolutely worth it”.

“We now have a Cook Islands voice within the Christian faith world which is available to all Cook Islands people wherever

they are in the world. It also highlights the Cook Islands Maori language and contributes to the linguistic world in the theological, cultural, and traditional and faith communities.”

Robert believes the project stands as an example to other Pacific nations to take up the same challenge with their own language Bibles.

The United Bible Societies global translation advisor, Dr Daud Soesilo, spoke at the launch and congratulated Robert and his team, saying “The Cook Islands Bible is now part of the world’s digital Bible library”.

“The language is no longer wandering in the wilderness,” said Dr Soesilo. “Welcome to the era of cyberspace where Cook Islands Maori is now part of the global language.”

For his part, Robert says that although the digitisation project wasn’t specifically founded on a desire to encourage young Cook Islanders to read the Bible, he hopes it will have that effect.

“I pray it will lead our young people to explore the Bible. Young people are so involved in the digital world and if this digital version is how they come to the Bible, then that is a wonderful thing.”

Robert is thankful for the overwhelming support he received, not only from his family but also from various Pacific island church communities.

“Praise God for the Cook Islands people who captured the vision and helped me to achieve it. Also to the other Cook Islands faith communities, such as the Cook Islands Christian Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, as well as the Catholic, Jehovah Witness and Assembly of God churches, who came together to unite for a common cause. I’m also exceedingly indebted to our current parish members of the Cook Islands Presbyterian Church, whose unwavering support allowed me to accomplish this massive task amongst the daily call to ministry within the parish.”

Ask Robert what’s next and he’ll say that he’s keen to get involved with other Pacific island churches who want to follow suit.

“The opportunity to translate commentaries to different books of the Bible is an opportunity I would like to be part of.”

Sharon Stephenson [@spanz](#)



Being Filled, Being Drained



Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark's Gospel doesn't start with Jesus' birth story. Unlike John he doesn't delve back to the beginning of time. Instead, Mark begins with Jesus following the rest of his people to be baptised by his cousin John in the Jordan River.

Eden Finlay's art work, pictured here, is from MARK: The Illustrated Gospel Project, and is titled, Being Filled, Being Drained. It is drawn from this passage (Mark 1:9-15), where Jesus' identity is poured over him in baptism, and from there it seeps out of him for the healing of a world that has forgotten itself. This art work points to the way that Jesus' baptism shapes the rest of the Gospel. Before this event, we don't know if Jesus grasps who he is. But after this heaven-tearing moment, filled with the voice of God affirming, "You are my true Son, my beloved one – Can you sense my delight in you?", he can have had no doubt.

No sooner is this reality revealed to him, than it is tested. Jesus is being tempted to relinquish what he has just received. Perhaps we can imagine the accusations ourselves - How can God love you? What have you done to deserve it? Jesus overcomes, not by conquering, but by resisting until Satan's accusations run out of steam.

Jesus returns from the wilderness and speaks of a kingdom that has this very moment come near. This kingdom is simply the proximity of Jesus; the one who is God's beloved, living into and out of God's pleasure in him, breaking that open to be shared with all. The ordinary and the overlooked are called to know themselves afresh as God's beloved. They join a revolution marked by turning from insular, fear-driven lives, to the wide open spaces of God's goodness towards the world.

Jesus' baptism liberates him. The dust of this world is washed away. He is named

and known by his father as the beloved son. He would return again and again to this truth. Each secluded retreat to pray was to find himself again beneath that sky torn open by love. And every return enabled him to resist the temptation to betray himself, to be a conquering messiah, to bring a selective salvation. It opened the way to a life of stunning beauty and simple obedience. That same life is opened to us.

This becomes a daily practice during Lent. In light of Eden Finlay's art, I remind myself to open my hands to love, receiving identity as a gift, knowing myself and others as beloved. Then I can also empty my hands, drawing on this love to resist the temptation to turn God's gift into my right, instead, keeping my hands open to receive and to give.

– Rev Malcolm Gordon is the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership's Worship, Music & Arts Enabler

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Churches shine light on Halloween

Let there be light! Many churches throughout the country held parties last Halloween to dispel the darkness.

Light Parties continue to be a popular fixture in many churches annual calendar. They offer an alternative to Halloween, minus ghoulish gatherings, scary movies and trick-or-treating. Children and their families celebrate the eve before All Saints Day in a light, safe and fun-filled atmosphere.

St Columba in Auckland hosted its 15th Light Party last year, for over 200 people. The Botany community has a high number of immigrants from diverse countries, many of whom don't attend the church at any other time.

"The key aspect is the opportunity for new migrants to feel part of a community," says children and family ministry leader Alex Tracey. "For us, the party is a ministry."

Their party is held on same day as Halloween. "We want this to be a real alternative to kids going out trick-or-treating, not as an extra," explains Alex. "The bottom line is they still go away with a bag of lollies, but they haven't frightened anyone in the process."

At the other end of the country, Dunedin's Light Party is also well-established. Held at the Forsyth Barr Stadium and organised by the Acts of Kindness Charitable Trust, the free event takes place on the nearest Sunday to Halloween. The Dunedin City Council waives the \$25,000 stadium hire

fee and the Light Party attracts up to 5,000 people. It takes over 200 volunteers to run, and Presbyterians are keenly involved. Moderator Right Rev Richard Dawson is one of those who sizzles sausages and lends a hand.

"They employ as many churches as possible on the day, and I volunteer because people are so grateful for the relaxed atmosphere," says Richard. "With plenty of officials on hand, parents feel safe to let their kids free range."

Richard says there is a cultural mismatch for Kiwis with Halloween, given that we are heading into spring. Pumpkins costing up to \$10 each this past year was also off-putting!

Halloween's origins lie in the Celtic eve of winter, when souls who died during the year were believed to journey to the underworld and older souls would return to visit loved ones. People wore masks to avoid being recognised by ghostly presences, and that's how witches, fairies and demons became associated.

Christchurch's Hope Church children's minister Rob Key says Halloween has been co-opted by American consumerism.

"I'm an Aussie and I see it as an imported money-making exercise that people here have bought into. I cringe at it. What we offer is not about 'give me this, give me that'. We want to be a blessing to people," he adds.

The Spring Party in its church auditorium in Hornby is not evangelical. The party addresses social isolation; it bridges new

people into the Church community and is valued for the focus on intergenerational faith formation.

"It's an opportunity for our young people to serve, and for family members to serve together," Rob explains. "We try to have 'people connectors' with a natural gift for chatting with strangers."

Common to all the parties are food stalls, carnival games, face painting, crafts and bouncy castles. At St Pauls Katikati in the Bay of Plenty the theme for 2017 was Under the Sea. It inspired a giant inflatable whale as the entrance to an underwater world offering seaweed-style skewers made of grapes, an ice challenge, and fishing.

Crossroads Church in Mangatangi Auckland is a rural farming community. The church held its first ever Light Party in 2017, fully funded by the Waikato District Council. In rural areas, the distances between properties make it unrealistic for children to trick-or-treat.

"We didn't want Mums driving kids into town to do that," says Zoe Fieten, one of three volunteer organisers. "We wanted our party to focus on building community. We did a three-minute 'God spot' at the end, after the lolly scramble."

The inaugural event was hugely successful, says Zoe. "The feedback was amazing. It can't happen without church members getting on board. It's a ministry."

Jade Reidy 



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WINNING TRUST THROUGH VIDEO GAMING



Expert gamer Caleb Griffith with his wife Jocelyn and their six-month old son Corban.

The longest one-on-one chat in the Bible provides Caleb Griffith with an analogy for how video gaming connects with youth work.

"It's about meeting people where they are," Caleb explains. "Jesus didn't talk spiritual all the time. When he met the woman at the well he talked to her about water first and only then about quenching spiritual thirst."

Caleb is an expert player (gamer) and part-time analyst for League of Legends (LoL), a competitive online team battle game that blends high fantasy and high stakes. LoL is a worldwide phenomenon, played by over 100 million people every month.

The 26-year-old Dunedin-based Presbyterian youth director climbed the Oceania rankings to 39. Attaining that extremely high ranking was the result of breaking his ankle.

"Around Easter last year, I'd just started a new job at Saddle Hill Foundation Trust, which I was overjoyed to get, when I slipped playing an outdoor game and was laid up for almost four months. I got up every day, made coffee, read the Bible... and played League of Legends."

He then asked his pregnant wife Jocelyn how she would feel about him applying for a full-time job in Sydney as a professional gamer.

"She wasn't too impressed. There was a remarkable opportunity dangling in front of me, but it was the wrong timing. I applied instead for an analyst role I could do online," he says.

Caleb was born in North Carolina, where his grandpa was a preacher. He studied nursing at RMIT in Melbourne and earned extra cash as a magician. A \$5,000 scholarship gave him the money to backpack around New Zealand, where he met his future wife who was playing piano in a Dunedin church. He returned to North Carolina but immigrated a year later. After working in two different pharmacies for a year he landed the job at Saddle Hill.

The Trust was set up by East Taieri Presbyterian Church in Mosgiel, where Caleb also preaches at the youth-focused Sunday night service. "It's all flashing lights and loud music, because that's what they wanted," he adds.

Meeting young people in their world space is fundamental. "It's called discipleship in the Christian world but my motto is relationship," he says. "LoL is another way to connect, like Jesus did. We build relationships through gaming. Then, when the going gets tough, they feel ok to come and talk to me," he says.

Up to 250 young people engage with the Trust each week, including Taieri College students, where a LoL group is flourishing. The online game teaches young people valuable skills, he says, which range from trust building and communication to learning how to lose gracefully.

"It's no different to sport psychology. Just like a rugby team. In LoL you always have five players pitted against another team of five, using the exact same map, but the team bond is even more vital because decisions are so intertwined. The deeper you go, the more it becomes an ecosystem."

The game is attractive to young people who don't necessarily enjoy physical sports and it now offers an educational pathway. Caleb says e-athletes can gain high-profile scholarships.

"The US offers Olympic athletes training visas and gives the same visa to League of Legends players."

Players can aspire to professional status, where the skills are focused on strategy and execution rather than technical ability, and to a World Championship with a US\$6 million prize pool. Last year's final in Beijing's National Stadium attracted 43 million online viewers. Players at this level are a rebuttal to the frequent criticism that online gaming is unhealthy and creates obese kids.

"Those gamers work out," counters Caleb. "They're fit and healthy. In fact, I've just had a short documentary made about me on that very subject. I'm not your stereotype."

Caleb, his wife and their six-month old son, have a 10-acre seaside farm. Caleb still plays LoL and travels to Sydney monthly in his analyst role with the professional Tectonic team, but he's moving into a different life stage as a mentor with youth and friends.

"I still speak their language, just like a retired professional rugby player, who enjoys watching and can pass on so much knowledge."

Jade Reidy [Spanz](#)

PressGo helps fund innovative ministry role

Three years after its establishment, Nelson's Whakatū Presbyterian has received funding for a new ministry position aimed at extending its mission in the community.

The funding has seen Rev Sage Harris appointed as Whakatū Presbyterian's associate minister. It is a role, says Whakatū's parish clerk Elaine Henry, that has two facets to it – one to identify styles of worship and teaching that could meet the needs of those not already engaged with the Christian faith, and the other to develop mission planning ideas in conjunction with the church's soon-to-be-formed local mission team.

"These ideas will centre around what innovative forms of worship might suit people not currently involved with church," Elaine explains. "The second phase is implementing and monitoring some of those ideas."

Sage will also take some of Whakatū's current worship services and visit people both in and outside the church, while his experience will add value to the church's youth programme.

The role dovetails perfectly with Sage's own vision of faith. "My heart is to see people come into a relationship with God," he says, "so when I heard Whakatū felt the same, it really resonated with me."

A Bible College of New Zealand graduate, Sage did his internship through Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (KCML) after a spell as a youth worker at Hope Presbyterian in West Melton. While at KCML, he completed two mission-orientated assignments – one explored God's workings in a community, while the other examined ways in which a church community could connect with the local community.

They were an ideal prelude for his new Whakatū role.

The funding initiative supporting Sage's appointment will see Whakatū Presbyterian contribute roughly one third of the cost over a four-year period, with the Alpine Mission Fund (approved by Alpine Presbytery) and the Church via PressGo contributing a diminishing amount over those four years. The intention is to promote growth at Whakatū Presbyterian to the point where it can either fully-fund or almost fully-fund the position by year five.

Whakatū minister Rev Jon Parkes says the time is right to reconfigure the church into a more "vibrant, innovative worshipping church" for the wider Nelson/Richmond community.

Whakatū Presbyterian was founded in January 2015 after three Presbyterian churches in the area were closed to create a new and more effective single church. Jon says once the initial groundwork was done it was clear they would need to increase leadership capacity and find new ways to relate to those both in and outside the church.

"This has not been thought up overnight...hard decisions have been made. We believe this is where God is taking us. Our church needs to change."



New Whakatū Presbyterian associate minister Rev Sage Harris, pictured with wife Nina and daughter Addie, is keen to help people in the Nelson/Richmond communities "come into a relationship with God".

Jon believes Sage is a great fit at a time when the current Whakatū leadership is at "maximum capacity".

"My thinking is that a model of many different small congregations could be the future. There are many large auditorium-based churches in this region, offering excellent worship and teaching. There is no point in trying to compete with that ... perhaps there should be a shift. Why not explore smaller groups, interactive church service styles, maybe even a regular 'picnic church'?"

The funding application process took around six months and a grateful Elaine says the project simply wouldn't have got off the ground without the assistance of PressGo's Lisa Wells and Alpine Presbytery's resource minister Darryl Tempero.

Lisa says that from a PressGo perspective, the project was unusual because the funding was for an individual whose role would involve a parish born out of a restructuring process.

"This is an excellent example of restructuring that has worked well. The decision to fund it for four years was because it was recognised that it would take four years to get it properly embedded. This will bridge that gap."

From Alpine's perspective, the decision to provide the grant was based mainly on the innovative nature of the new Whakatū appointment.

"Right from the start, it was acknowledged that an additional ordained minister would be needed, primarily because of Whakatū's strategic importance. Since the merger took place it is the only Presbyterian presence in the region," says Darryl. "We encouraged them to apply for funding support for another minister; this was a very successful congregation-initiated process."

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



Retreat treats youth leaders

The Church's key youth leaders were refreshed and inspired at a new retreat held in Queenstown last November.

The retreat was the first in a new initiative from the Presbyterian Church Youth Ministry (PYM) aimed at providing a platform for networking and training, and demonstrating appreciation for work done by youth leaders in ministry around the country.

From November 27 to 29, 35 key youth leaders – those heading up youth ministries – found encouragement and support as they shared ideas on best practice for their youth ministries. One of the main intentions was to provide the leaders with time away from the busyness of their role to grow in their own spirituality.

It was, says participant Karo Wilson, a time to revitalise, the perfect opportunity to “refill our own vessels” to be better equipped to help others.

“We were able to spend time discussing and brainstorming ideas around the challenges of youth ministry, both in a universal sense and in our own contexts,” she says.

Matt Chamberlin, PYM National Youth Director, says several factors guided the decision to establish a biennial retreat focusing specifically on key youth leaders. Research had shown that the effectiveness of youth leaders, whether in paid or voluntary roles, decreased significantly if those leaders did not remain in situ for at least five to six years.

“If they stay for that length of time, the youth ministry tends to thrive and

numbers grow,” Matt says. “Sadly, the tenure of most leaders is under two years, leading to a decline in that youth ministry. Those findings have shown how important it is for us strategically to invest more into our key youth leaders.”

In seeking a solution, PYM came across seven sustainable practices adopted by churches with a record of longevity among their youth leaders. They were the offer of prayer and spiritual support; space for reflection and rest; ongoing training and development; the provision of at least one day's rest each week; shared responsibility; striving to be an excellent employer; and the celebration and appreciation of youth leaders.

“We took these into account when considering what we needed to do for our youth leaders,” says Matt. “A well-received retreat for Central Presbytery region youth advisors served as a pilot. It was important for us that this retreat didn't feel like just another training event. It needed to feel like a treat, something that really showed our appreciation. It also needed to be fun.”

Funding for the Queenstown retreat was shared by the Wilkinson Trust and the Synod of Otago and Southland, and attendance was free to those youth leaders who had attended the PYM Connect 2017 conference last July.

Otago and Southland Synod youth advisor Brad Kelderman said the Synod has always supported youth ministry as part of its overall commitment to ministry, and it considers investment in leadership as one of the best ways to encourage healthy ministry.

Last November 35 key youth ministry leaders were treated to a stunning Queenstown location for a new PYM retreat.

“This retreat was a great opportunity to do just that,” he says.

Part of the upskilling and regeneration process at the retreat involved a Soul Restoration session around personal spiritual growth, led by Dr Deborah Bower, a church leadership support advisor for the Southern Presbytery. Another session was led by Canterbury Youth Services leader Mike Dodge, who spoke about the pain of multiple youth suicides in Christchurch. He encouraged and challenged key leaders to stop “playing youth group,” and instead create ministries that care for and lead people into a relationship with Christ.

Karo Wilson found the workshops well-balanced and relevant, both for her ministry and on a personal level. Other retreat participants – Derek Saumolia and Ben Tennant – agreed.

“They challenged us...they were a timely reminder for us to anchor our faith in Christ and not just in programmes and games,” Ben says.

Derek describes the workshops and level of support offered to youth leaders as hugely beneficial. “It generated a lot of good ideas, which I have taken back to my team in Wellington.”

Matt says the retreats will be held in alternate years to the General Assembly, and Queenstown proved a popular venue choice for future events. The next will be in 2019, and he hopes to increase the numbers of youth leaders who attend.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)

New mission booklet in search of home



Holding the new KCML booklet *Snapshots in Mission* are some of its contributors, from left: KCML senior lecturer Rev Dr Kevin Ward, PressGo Catalyst Lisa Wells, pastor and Otago University lecturer Lynne Taylor, and KCML Principal Rev Dr Steve Taylor.

In a world where increasingly transient populations communicate more through technology than via a neighbourly chat, the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (KCML) says the time seems right to re-examine our understanding of the call to mission. To this end it has produced a booklet, *Snapshots in Mission*.

The free booklet is a compilation of eight essays on mission in New Zealand from a Presbyterian perspective. Published by KCML, it will be sent to all of the Church's parishes and can be downloaded from their website.

Snapshots will also be offered as a free webinar during Lent, when the authors will be interactively available for questions.

The booklet is part of the 'Missions Seedlings' project KCML is facilitating in partnership with presbyteries, Synods and others around the country.

Centred on concepts of 'home' – domestic, church, national and international – *Snapshots* reflects lay and ordained views by Rosemary Dewerse, Steve Taylor, Kevin Ward, Mark Johnston, Lisa Wells, Lynne Taylor and Carolyn Kelly. They unpick topics that include home and neighbourhood, new mission seedlings, Maori responses to 'home invasion', migratory congregations, and reaching out to Christ through friendship.

John Roxborough, a Christian biographer and mission historian, and former senior lecturer in Reformed Studies at KCML, describes *Snapshots* as part of "a revolution".

"It is a Vatican 2," he enthuses. "It has turned theology on its head. It shows the

college is in active listening mode with the wider Church and culture. This shows that KCML is a good place to be training Presbyterian ministers today."

John described the themes and the stimulus to imagination as "hugely encouraging" and says the book is an excellent source of material, both for study groups and parish leaders seeking options in their own situation.

Theological education at KCML is, he believes, about taking action-orientated spirituality seriously, about learning through listening, and growing leadership. "That listening, faith and engagement helps identify questions worth asking in the face of migration and social change."

The *Snapshots* booklet came into being through happenstance more than by design. It grew out of an Australian Association for Mission Studies conference held in Melbourne last July, with the theme "Reimagining Home". Seven of the ten Presbyterian Church representatives in attendance presented research papers, each one around 2500 words in length.

KCML Principal, Rev Dr Steve Taylor was among them. He was keen to peer review his teaching around mission and theological reflection and felt that 2017, as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, was a good year in which to consider what that meant for New Zealand today.

As the conference progressed, Steve delighted in the good turnout by New Zealand Presbyterians, and wondered if there was a way to share their input further; he suggested the Presbyterian Church speakers summarise their papers in around 1000 words.

"The word *Snapshots* was to evoke that sense of a moment in time. Here are eight snapshots of what people in 2017 are thinking about mission. Like a photo, it marks a moment," he says.

Mission remains important and relevant, Steve explains, because the world is changing.

"In Luke 10:27, we are called to 'love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind', and to 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. Researching mission enables us to use our mind in thinking about mission as loving our neighbours as ourselves.

"Technology is changing our communities and how we understand home. Times are changing. What used to work doesn't. So we as Presbyterian Church need to think, and *Snapshots* shows that we are. Thinking about mission needs to be shared; research belongs not only in the ivory towers of academic conferences, but also in more accessible ways."

He believes KCML and the Presbyterian Church is doing just that. Last year, he says, KCML connected with more than 1,400 people nationally through a range of workshops. It also piloted its first online learning in 2017, inviting ministers to form a team from their local church and undertake a set of listening exercises in their local community.

Download the free KCML mission resource, *Snapshots in Mission* knoxcentre.ac.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Snapshots-in-mission-Full.pdf and see more information on the *Snapshots* free webinars to be held during Lent knoxcentre.ac.nz

Viv Posselt Spanz

PWANZ Special Project helps NZ and Nicaragua

They might be completely different, but young people in Nicaragua impacted by violence and Kiwi families affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) now have something in common, thanks to Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand (PWANZ).



Rosa and her daughter Eleana, pictured, receive on-going support from The Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD) which recently received funds from Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand. Eleana is part of a psychosocial group set up and supported by CEPAD. Photo: CEPAD.

The two programmes have been supported by PWANZ's 2016/17 Special Project. Each year the Project supports both an international and a domestic programme, a joint effort between PWANZ and the Methodist Women's Fellowship explains Sally Russell, PWANZ Mission Convenor.

"We partner with Christian World Service (CWS), the aid and development agency for both the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, which identifies overseas projects we can fund under the programme."

For the 2016/2017 year, the Special Project raised around \$20K, which is usually split 70/30 between the two initiatives. This year it was the turn of the international project to receive the lion's share of the fundraising, so \$14,441 was donated to a project in Nicaragua which helps young people in 40 rural communities to tackle violence.

Trish Murray, from CWS, says they partnered with The Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD), which works at the grassroots level to focus on food security, environmental protection and strengthening the community. "That's why they are such a key partner for us," says Trish.

This year CWS, with PWANZ, supported the psychosocial activity of CEPAD's wider programme, training 124 young people to work with their peers on issues of overcoming shyness, literacy, communication skills, hyperactivity and domestic violence.

"Nicaragua has a culture of machismo so these young people talked to schools, churches and youth groups about anger management and domestic violence,

and about finding new ways of working together as a family and a community," says Trish.

She adds that PWANZ's fundraising efforts will contribute to the NZ\$144,000 yearly cost of the five-year programme, with the Special Project funds earmarked for this specific aspect of the programme, carrying over to the second year as well.

Meanwhile, support for Care Action Network's work with New Zealand families affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder came from a growing awareness of the condition in New Zealand, says Sally.

"This organisation is made up of and for parents, who have seen the need to help those affected and raise awareness of the condition. We were happy to contribute the remainder of our 2016/17 Special Project fund, of \$6,189.00 to help them achieve their goals."

Sally says around 40 to 50 PWANZ groups around New Zealand contributed to the Special Project fund with a range of activities.

"Most of them revolved around food! But I'm very proud of the way PWANZ members get involved and work hard towards raising funds in their communities."

Each branch has the freedom to plan and carry out its own fundraising efforts and this year those ranged from bun and soup lunches after church to a dinner in Nelson with local musicians who provided the entertainment.

"And the Upper Hutt PWANZ group organised what it called a Divine Meal, inviting members of their multi-ethnic community to cook food and provide displays of their culture, while charging

other church members to partake of the food and entertainment."

Sally says all Presbyterian churches have been receptive to PWANZ fundraising efforts, as have the churches' communities.

"They understand how important these projects are to us and fully support us."

It is too soon to say how effective the 2016/2017 Special Project grants to Nicaragua and FASD-CAN have been. "The funds have just been contributed, but we monitor them and will find out what kind of impact they are having," she says.

Sally and CWS are now busy working on the Special Project 2017/18, which this time focuses on children.

The New Zealand project works with PILLARS, Ka Pou Whakahou, which exists to create positive futures for the children of prisoners in Aotearoa, by supporting them to cope with parental imprisonment.

"The international project, working with CWS and their partner the Centre for Community Solidarity in Uganda, is working with people caring for orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV and AIDS by providing rainwater harvesting tanks so children don't have to spend so much time collecting water," says Sally.

For more information, visit:

www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/presbyterian-women-aotearoa-new-zealand/special-project

Sharon Stephenson Spanz



Vicar to teach English to Ni-Van Presbyterians

Anglican vicar Rev Dawn Daunada, will find herself saying “nem blong mi Dawn” fairly often from February as she begins a year teaching English at the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu’s Talua Theological Training Institute.

The expression in the local Bislama language means “My name is Dawn”. The friendly introduction will she hopes open doors to a deeper communication. Over the course of the coming year, Dawn will help Ni-Vanuatu students develop their conversational English and bring their written skills to a level where they are able to write examinations in English. Dawn also expects to lead a women’s study group during her stay on the island of Espiritu Santo, and may assist with college chapel services.

While at first glance having an Anglican vicar teach at a Presbyterian theological training institute might seem unusual, both Dawn and the Church’s Global Mission Coordinator, Rev Phil King, say the co-operative mix is ideal.

Dawn has ministered at the Awatere Christian Joint Venture – the Seddon/Awatere Co-operating Church in Marlborough – for some time. The Anglican/Presbyterian parish works closely with other Christian denominations, and she quickly dispels any notion that the cross-denomination nature of her appointment might be challenging.

“To reassure dyed-in-the-wool Presbyterians, I will be teaching only English, not theology!” she laughs.

Dawn has never formally trained as a teacher, however in 1980 she taught at St Andrew’s, an Anglican school in Tonga, and has worked in different parts of the Pacific. After completing her theology training, she took the reins



Rev Dawn Daunada with Daniel Saul, a Ni-Vanuatu from Santo (in the blue) and two Kiribati church-goers, after taking her last service at the Seddon/Awatere Co-operating Church.

at the Seddon/Awatere Co-operating Church in July 2010, some two years after seasonal workers from Vanuatu and Kiribati began arriving in the area. Their numbers have grown steadily since then, and with it the relationships built through weekly Bible study sessions, Sunday services, music and testimony – although she does wonder wryly whether their attendance at church is as much for the freshly-baked banana cake she whips up before services as for her ministering abilities.

Phil King believes Dawn’s experience with Ni-Vanuatu will add value to her role in Talua. He says, “I first met her several years ago at a meeting I organised for supporters of our partnership with the Church in Vanuatu. Dawn was the vicar in Seddon and came along because of her contact with Ni-Van seasonal workers. This contact has been ongoing...she has had an active interest for a long time.”

He says that while the Talua training centre has had a healthy working relationship with different denominations in the past, this will be the first time an ordained clergy member of the Anglican Church will join the team.

“We are open and flexible to work with whoever has the passion and sense of calling, along with the gifts, skills and abilities to serve in Vanuatu,” he explains.

Spending 2018 in Vanuatu will be a healing time for Dawn, a chance to press the re-set button. Recent years have seen her tackle

personal difficulties as well as minister to far-spread communities rocked by a series of devastating earthquakes.

“My bishop was concerned that I might burn out. He asked me to imagine what I would love to do, and off the top of my head, I mentioned returning to the islands to teach. We explored several options, but as soon as I enquired about Talua, the doors just opened. Presbyterian Church’s Phil King, Steve Maina from the NZ Church Missionary Society (NZCMS), the Anglican Mission Board and others have all come together and provided all the support and finance needed.

“My head is still spinning from the collaborative provision and the wonderful opportunity for useful refreshment.”

Dawn will live in the Presbyterian Church’s house on campus while at Talua. In consultation with the Church, she will also work with a Southland team who will replace the dining room roof at Talua. There are likely to be other building projects on the go. Her NZCMS role will be to explore mission and ministry opportunities in Vanuatu throughout holiday periods.

For now, however, Dawn is mulling over how she will cope with the energy-sapping island heat. At the same time she is looking forward to learning about where and how God is at work in Vanuatu, and to serving God’s people there.

Viv Posselt [Spanz](#)



Embracing Myanmar culture



The Going Global group took part in the Tahan Theological College annual Fun Fete, which is held over two nights and attended by around 6,000 people. Women were encouraged to don the dress of various local ethnic groups for the fun fete photography booth.

Dressing up in traditional Myanmar dress and having their photo taken by curious locals was a first for a group from Auckland's St Columba and Forrest Hill Presbyterian churches on their recent mission to Myanmar.

The group of five young adults and two leaders travelled as part of the Going Global programme from 28 November-13 December 2017. They were supported by the Presbyterian Church's Global Mission through the Rice Bowl Mission, says Bruce Dixon, an elder at Auckland's St Columba Church. Bruce, along with Fiona Whyte from Forrest Hill Presbyterian Church, co-led the trip.

"We spent time sharing in the life of a local community, introducing our young people to a different culture and to their peers, and leading them on a spiritual journey," says Bruce.

Bruce and Fiona jumped at the chance to help the five 18-25 year-olds – Nicola Froud, Daniel Choi, Sarah Lawry, Stephanie White and Molly Pottinger-Coombes - learn about the culture of Myanmar.

The group flew into Yangon where they spent two days acclimatising and meeting with representatives from the New Zealand Embassy, as well as World Vision staff, who provided an insight into the development work each is doing in the region. They also met with two Catholic nuns who run a teacher training programme.

"We managed a bit of sight-seeing with a visit to the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, the largest and most sacred Buddhist pagoda in Myanmar," says Bruce.

From there it was on to Tahan/Kalaymyo, a region in the north-west of the country, where they were invited to visit by the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar's Tahan Theological College (TTC). The visit coincided with TTC's Christmas/end of year celebrations including the annual Fun Fete, which is held over two nights and attended by around 6,000 people. The group spent a number of days helping to prepare – setting up facilities such as stalls and display areas – and also actively participated. This included performing the Christmas carol, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, and Nicola Froud, a flautist, played *Silent Night* to the appreciative crowd.

A fundraising opportunity saw the group dress in local costume and charge a modest fee to be photographed with locals. "Western tourists are still a bit of a novelty in Myanmar so they loved having their picture taken with us," says Bruce.

All proceeds went back to TTC, as did funds which the group raised before they left for the trip.

"This money was used to help purchase a van for the TTC," says Fiona Whyte, who worked with the group to organise a range of fundraising activities.

"Activities were undertaken both collectively and individually and ranged from an all-you-can-eat pancakes and movie night for \$5, which raised \$284, to gardening, washing windows, tree chopping, house cleaning, and house and cat-sitting," says Fiona.

Their respective church families were also "incredibly supportive", she adds.

"They really got behind the group, as well as our missions committee. We're thankful for the many donations which helped us meet our target."

Nicola Froud says she was "dying" to be part of a Rice Bowl Mission, having been too young to travel with a 2013 delegation to Myanmar when she was 17 years old.

"We were all very certain that we were meant to be there - I only have to look at the rate of my fundraising prior to the trip to see God's hand and intentions all over this," she says.

"One of the best parts was when everybody wanted to pay for photos with us, we were just so different! It was a way that we could be truly useful. I had gone in with the expectation of some big emotional or spiritual experiences, as we sometimes hear reported from mission trips, and was surprised to find God in the daily, in the rhythm and heartbeat of the place, in the mundane and in the gentle nature of the people in Myanmar."

Nicola says for her it was a hugely successful trip and she'd love to go back on another mission. "I would go back a little less naive about what it means to travel in Asia, a little less wide-eyed!"

Sharon Stephenson [Spanz](#)



global mission

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A Global Vision: Leave No One Behind



ACT Alliance/Paul Jeffrey

Last year Romzima (pictured) made the dangerous trip out of Myanmar. Like other Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, she spends her days on the hard task of survival – turning the steep hill in front of the makeshift shelter that is her home into land that will hold soil and water. Not one to give up easily, she is finding a way to supplement the support she receives from ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) of which Christian World Service is a member.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could help victims of violence and poverty like Romzima, and the families of HIV and AIDS orphans in Uganda - a project which has been supported by the Special Project of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand and Methodist Women's Fellowship.

In September 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly world leaders signed up to 17 ambitious goals that, if achieved, would transform the world as we know it. From the first goal to “end Poverty in all its forms everywhere” to the seventeenth, requiring a strong commitment to partnership and cooperation, nations signed up “to leave no one behind”. Alongside the goals are 169 targets – for example, free and equitable primary and secondary school education for all – and the expectation that nations will report on their achievements.

Built on the successful eight Millennium Development Goals which halved the number of people living in poverty and gave 2.6 billion people access to improved

drinking water, these new goals were intended to benefit everyone starting with the most vulnerable. In 2000 when the MDGs came into effect, climate change and the state of the environment were not seen as closely linked to development. By 2015, they were unavoidable. To achieve the SDGs by 2030, governments, businesses, churches, non-governmental organisations and individuals will need to contribute energy and resources. However two years in, the more ambitious agenda seems to be slipping away and is in urgent need of new attention.

As used as we are to focusing on the plight of one group of refugees or a family in need of food or shelter, the SDGs promise a more embracing solution to human suffering. As part of the long process leading to the adoption of the goals at the UN, government representatives argued over every word. Negotiators may have spent too much time in all night briefings, but the goals contain the promise of a future where no one is hungry, discriminated against based on gender, or denied an education, something that fits well with CWS's vision. ACT Alliance has made this agenda a priority in its advocacy work.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as it is known, is to be led and owned by individual nations. The goals were adopted by and are for all countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand. While many other governments and even cities have had community and national consultations on these priorities, New Zealand has been slow to take up the

agenda. Two years on there is much work to do at home and on the global scene if we are to use them as an incentive to build a sustainable future.

Far from being a nice wish list aimed at poor people, these goals are highly political. To meet the aspirations of people needing food, decent work and protection will require deliberate action. When the six richest people on the planet own more than the bottom 3.7 billion people this new agenda offers a mechanism for rebalancing the global economy in the interests of the majority.

Global issues require a global contribution. The advent of climate change has helped us recognise that we need to find ways of working politically to forge new agreements for our shared future. For CWS and ACT Alliance this is a faith imperative, a way of showing God's love for the whole world.

While negotiations continue with the government of Myanmar over the future of the Rohingya people and their status, CWS is getting on with the job of making sure refugees get the help they need to survive and to deal with their trauma. The challenge is to find new ways of addressing the underlying causes of their plight and make sure refugees like Romzima are not forgotten.

If you would like to find out more about SDG, Victoria University is hosting a SDG summit on 23 April in Wellington.

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