



Hui Tōpu 2024: Transformation in Action

Rev Peter Norman

A Gathering of Significance

Hui Tōpu 2024 was a sacred gathering of faith, reflection, and transformation. Guided by the theme **“Don’t Just Change, Transform!”**, and grounded in **Ecclesiastes 3:1** (“For everything there is a season”) and **Romans 12:2** (“Be transformed by the renewing of your minds”), Conference invited us to move beyond superficial adjustments to embrace profound, holistic renewal - spiritually, socially, and environmentally. This gathering affirmed Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa’s mission to be a Church of justice, reconciliation, and guardianship in today’s world.

Sacred Milestones: Honouring the Past and Embracing Leadership

Hui Tōpu opened with a Service of Remembrance, where we honoured those who had passed since our last gathering. Their names were read, their photos shared, and their contributions celebrated, grounding us in gratitude and reflection.

A historic milestone followed as Te Aroha Rountree was inducted as the first wahine Māori President of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa. Standing beside her as Vice-President was an honour and a reminder of our shared commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the bicultural covenant it represents.

Sunday’s Ordination and Reception into Full Connexion brought joy and hope, celebrating the Church’s commitment to nurturing leadership that aligns with its mission and values. These milestones reminded us that transformation begins with honouring the past and embracing leadership rooted in justice and equity.

The PekaPeka: A Sacred Symbol of Guardianship and Vision

One of the most moving moments was the blessing of the PekaPeka, a taonga pounamu gifted by Te Taha Māori. Representing guardianship, honesty, and the ability to see what is unseen, the PekaPeka challenges us to act with courage and integrity.

Receiving this sacred taonga reaffirmed our calling as kaitiaki - guardians of creation, relationships, and justice - while honouring our bicultural journey and the enduring significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Workshops and Plenaries: Engaging Critical Issues

Thematic sessions throughout the Conference addressed pressing challenges:

- **Te Taiao: Climate Justice and Climate Migrants:** Highlighted the human cost of environmental change, calling the Church to act as faithful kaitiaki.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi and He Whakaputanga:** Reaffirmed the enduring significance of these foundational documents, emphasising equity, partnership, and inclusion.

These workshops emphasized the interconnectedness of justice, faith, and guardianship, providing actionable insights for the Church’s journey forward.

Manuhiri Tūārangi: Voices of Wisdom and Inspiration

Distinguished guests enriched Hui Tōpu with their insights and testimonies:

- **Rev Dr Semisi Turagavou**, Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma: Climate resilience and Pasifika spirituality.
- **Rev Charissa Suli**, Uniting Church in Australia: Inclusive leadership.

- **Rev Mark Kickett** and **Alison Overeem**, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress: Indigenous justice and reconciliation.
- **Rev Dr Eteuati Tuioti** and his wife **Maselina Tuioti**, Methodist Church in Samoa: Social justice and community development.

Their stories deepened our understanding of global struggles for justice, urging us to act with courage and compassion in our local contexts.

The Spirit of Transformation

Throughout Hui Tōpu, the Spirit's presence was tangible. From the sacred blessing of the PekaPeka to the boldness of decisions and the depth of discussions, the week was a living testament to faith in action.

This transformation was not merely structural but deeply spiritual, renewing our hearts and minds. It was seen in the reverence of the Service of Remembrance, the celebration of leadership milestones, and the courageous decisions embracing climate responsibility and bicultural partnership.

The PekaPeka reminds us to trust the Spirit's guidance, embrace the unseen, and act with integrity as we step forward in faith.

Conclusion: A Call to Act with Courage and Hope

Hui Tōpu 2024 was a declaration of faith in action. It renewed our commitment to transformation in its fullest sense, challenging us to:

- **Empower Rangatahi Leadership:** Ensure youth voices shape the Church's future through the Rangatahi Strategy.
- **Honour Bicultural Partnerships:** Strengthen relationships between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti through **Te Hāpai ō ki Muri**.
- **Advocate for Creation Care:** Respond to the climate crisis as faithful kaitiaki of te taiao.

Transformation is a journey that demands courage to embrace the unknown, humility to learn from one another, and faith in God's unfolding purpose. As we carry forward the Spirit of Hui Tōpu, may the PekaPeka inspire us to act with integrity, guard what is entrusted to us, and embody the Spirit's transformative call. Together, as Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa, let us rise to the challenges of our time, becoming beacons of hope, agents of justice, and witnesses to Christ's transforming love.



A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF JOY AND HOPE



Christmas is a wonderful time. It's a chance to pause, breathe, and soak up the magic of the season. This year, as we gather with loved ones, share kai, and belt out our favourite carols, let's take a moment to remember why we celebrate.

The birth of Jesus is a story bursting with hope! Born into the margins of a world under the crushing weight of Roman occupation—a time of oppression, control, and fear—Jesus' arrival shows us that transformation often begins in the simplest, most unexpected places. It wasn't just a moment in history—it was the start of a movement, a bold call to live with radical love, justice, and renewal. Christmas reminds us that redemption is all about restoration. It's a nudge to heal what's broken, to reconnect with the beauty and balance of the world around us, and to join in the Spirit's work of renewal.

So, as you unwrap gifts, laugh with your whānau, and perhaps sneak an extra helping of pudding, let this season fill your heart with joy and purpose. Let's carry the message of Christ—of love, compassion, and hope—into every corner of our lives.

Meri Kirihimete! May this season bring you light, peace, and endless blessings.

Ngā manaakitanga o te wā, Rev Peter Norman



Conference 2024 Key Decisions

1. *Safeguarding Policy*: The Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy was approved, reinforcing our commitment to creating safe, supportive environments across all ministries.
2. *Royal Commission Recommendations*: In response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry's recommendations, the Church Law Book now includes guidelines on professional development, supervision, spiritual direction, performance review, and safeguarding for ministry roles, ensuring responsible leadership within the Church.
3. *Connexional Property Strategy*: A new Connexional Property Strategy was approved, with a Working Group directed to implement changes in 2025 in partnership with the Methodist Connexional Property Committee. Progress will be reviewed at the next Conference.
4. *Resourcing the Church*: The Trust Board of PACT 2086 was directed to allocate up to \$30 million over the next six years to resource the Church's mission.
5. *Te Hāpai o Ki Muri*: A new law was approved to establish Te Hāpai o Ki Muri, replacing Mission Resourcing and enhancing our mission capabilities.
6. *New Kai Hāpai*: We welcomed Nicola Grundy as Kai Hāpai, recognising that her leadership will be instrumental as we navigate this period of change.
7. *Synod Amalgamation Discussion*: The Kai Hāpai will collaborate with the Auckland, Manukau, Northland, and Waikato-Wairiki Synods to explore potential amalgamations with a report expected at Conference 2025.
8. *Pastoral and President's Committees*: Conference approved recommendations from the reviews of the Pastoral Committee and the President's Committee of Advice, reflecting our commitment to continuous improvement in governance and pastoral care.
9. *New Disciplinary Code*: Conference approved a new Disciplinary Code in Section 8 of the Church Law Book, enhancing our standards for accountability and community care.
10. *Opposition to the Treaty Principles Bill*: Conference expressed opposition to the Treaty Principles Bill currently before Parliament, affirming our commitment to justice based on Treaty principles.



Touchstone Contact Details

I welcome feedback on content included in *Touchstone*.

Ngā mihi nui

Ady Shannon, Editor *Touchstone*

Email: adys@methodist.org.nz

Phone: 021 209 9702



Conference from a Different Lens.

Rev Sandra Williams, Presbyter Levin Uniting Church, reported on Conference in the parish newsletter *The Bridge Touchstone* shares a report that captures the work of Conference 2024 from a different lens.

Spending a week at the Conference of Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa the Methodist Church of New Zealand has been both challenging and encouraging. The new Presidential team of Te Aroha Rountree (President) and Rev Peter Norman (Vice President) announced at their installation the theme for

this year's Conference, ***Don't Just Change, Transform!*** Their aim? To "steer Te Hāhi toward a transformative future, rooted in justice and reconciliation for all creation".

The business of the church was interspersed with plenary sessions on topics of great importance not just for the followers of Christ, but for our wider New Zealand society and for the world.

Climate Justice

As Te Hāhi (the church) continues its decade of "Rekindling the Vā of Papatūānuku" (restoring the integrity of the land) we were invited through drama, video and discourse to reflect on the story of Noah and the flood. The young people of the church implored us to build a modern ark – an ark not of wood, but of care and compassion. We listened through video link as the Honourable Maina Talia, Tuvaluan's minister of Home Affairs, Climate Change and Environment shared with us the urgency of action for the people of the Pacific, especially Tuvalu and Kiribati. We were encouraged to continue in our efforts to care for the environment while calling on our government to enable "migration with dignity" for Pacific Peoples whose homes, heritage and ancestral connections are being lost through rising sea levels.

Dawn Raids – 50 Years On

Conference opened on Friday with the unveiling of a mural on the side of the offices of Wesley Community Action to remember those impacted by the Dawn Raids 1974-1976.

Described as "the most blatantly racist attacks on Pacific Peoples by the New Zealand government in New Zealand's history" the Police were instructed by the government to enter homes and/or stop people on the street seeking proof of a person's right to be in the country. Even though the bulk of overstayers in the 1970's and 1980's came from Europe or North America, the 'blunt force of the law' was applied almost exclusively to Pacific Peoples.

While we sat in mourning as we reflected on this dark era of our country's history, we were challenged also to acknowledge the ongoing existence of racial prejudice, both in society and in the church too.

Report on Abuse in State and Faith-based Institutions

Conference business was paused on Tuesday as we watched the apology presented by the Honourable Christopher Luxon on behalf of our government. We heard from church representatives who were with the victims as their pain was acknowledged. They spoke of the overwhelming plethora of emotions and of the way that being in that space uncomfortably revealed their own previously unrealised prejudices and assumptions. And we heard about the church's work of redress too.

Conference adopted an overarching Safeguarding Policy and talked about the immense work required to ensure such abuse is not repeated and we committed funds to enable that work. In these discussions we heard and unanimously agreed on the importance of all Safeguarding incorporating the ways of Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pasifika, the cultural groups most impacted by abuse in care.

Hīkoi mō te Tiriti

We heard via video link from some of the rangatahi (youth) from the church involved in the

organisation of the hikoi to parliament and why the upholding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is important for all New Zealanders. We heard from members of Te Taha Māori about their concern for the way the bill is giving voice to racism and enhancing inequity. We unanimously supported the open letter to parliament from over 400 leaders from many church denominations, including Methodist and Presbyterian and we agreed that upholding the integrity of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) is important for all New Zealanders, both tangata whenua and those of us whose ancestry began elsewhere.

Te Hāhi's Bi-cultural Journey 40 Years On

The Council of Conference reported on Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa's 40-year journey as an intentionally bi-cultural church. It spoke of the implementation of structures within the operations of the church that reflect power sharing and develop equity for all cultural groups. We continued conversations begun at the 2022 Conference about the place of He Whakaputanga, the original Declaration of Independence signed by Māori Chiefs and English representatives 5 years prior to Te Tiriti. We agreed to work toward the aspirational goals of incorporating both He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi into the church's Mission Statement and to ensuring this intent actively and positively impacts the way we work and relate to one another across the different cultural groups of Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa.



AROUND THE CONNEXION



175th Anniversary of the Stoke Church of the Nelson Tasman Methodist Parish

Rev. Martin Sungchel Oh.

Descendants of the early Methodists in Nelson and Tasman, parishioners and other guests came together for a celebration weekend on 2- 3 November as the Nelson Tasman Methodist Parish marked 175 years of the Stoke Methodist Church.

The celebration started on Saturday morning as people arrived to write names on the memory tree, which was a way of acknowledging past members. Visitors included people from local community groups which our parish supports. It was a blessing to hear their appreciations for what our parish offers them. Over lunch we enjoyed fellowship and then people explored the history of the Methodist parish in the Nelson and Tasman area.

History

The Methodist ministries date back to 1842, when missionary Samuel Ironside held his first service in Nelson City, establishing the groundwork for Methodism in the region. The Wesleyan Church, subsequently known as St John's Parish, was Nelson's first church, built in 1843 at the corner of Haven Road and Rutherford Street. Methodist services started in Richmond in 1843, and the first chapel was built the following year. Services also began in Stoke in 1843, with the establishment of the Ebenezer Chapel in December 1849 on land on the main road provided by Mr Marsden.

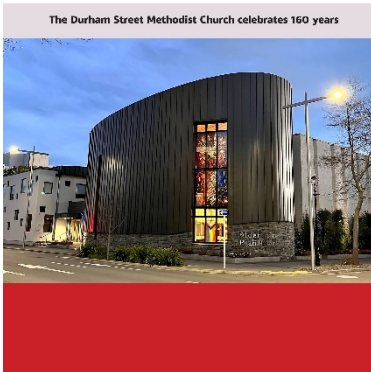
The journey of the Richmond-Stoke parish began when the Wakefield church merged with the Richmond congregation in 2015. In August 2018, St John's Methodist Parish decided to become part of the Stoke church of the Richmond-Stoke Parish which thus became the Nelson Tasman Parish. Later, in September 2022, the Richmond congregation chose to join the congregation at Stoke after selling their church complex. The process of unifying with other congregations may seem straightforward on paper, but it took tremendous hard work to reach this point.

A Well Supported Celebration

We extend our thanks to the 175th anniversary committee members Barbara Watson, Valerie Knight, Wayne and Rachel Chapman and Jan Thompson. We also thank parish stewards, Wayne Chapman, and Nadia Madill, as well as Community Support Team Coordinators Linda Grant and Pam Petts. Through the work of the Community Support Team, the Nelson Tasman Parish continues the proud legacy of Methodism and its spirit of service to the community, sharing God's love and embracing all with open arms regardless of their background or beliefs. Finally, we thank South Island Superintendent Rev Dale Peach for leading the Sunday Communion service on this historic occasion.



OPEN HEARTS
OPEN MINDS
OPEN DOORS



Durham Street Celebrate 160th Anniversary

Over Labour Weekend 2024, the Durham Street Methodist Church (also known as Christchurch Central Methodist Parish) celebrated its 160th Anniversary. Along with fellowship, reunion and rejoicing, this special occasion served as a powerful reminder of the parish's commitment to social justice, to supporting the marginalised, to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to developing a curious and inclusive community deepening faith in action.

The iconic Aldersgate Centre opened in February 2020. The original building erected in 1864 and tragically destroyed in the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake was the first stone church completed on the Canterbury Plains.

More than a year before the celebrations, work had begun recording an updated history of the parish since the time of the last publication at the 125th Anniversary in 1989. The new book entitled *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors*, edited by Wallace Woodley, contains chapters covering the successive presbyteral periods, the story of the devastating earthquake, the rebuild years, the music story and the individual groups associated with parish life.

The publication was launched at the Saturday evening celebration dinner attended by sixty guests, some of whom had travelled from the North Island. Additional greetings from previous presbyters and members unable to be present were shared with the assembly. Entertainment included a vocal solo presented by Malcolm Palmer (baritone), accompanied by pianist Wallace Woodley, and video clips of ballet dancer, Tasman Davids, recorded during his decade of study and solo stage performances in Russia as the first ever New Zealander to be granted such an honour.

A Service of Thanksgiving on Sunday morning was led by the present presbyter, Rev Philomeno Kinera, with guest preacher, Rev Peter Taylor, then President of the Methodist Church of New Zealand.

A well-rehearsed augmented choir of 18 singers, comprising present and past parishioners and four members of nearby Knox (Presbyterian Church) Singers, presented several anthems and led the congregational hymn-singing. The choir was supported by a guest baritone vocalist, Alex Robinson, and parish instrumentalists on organ, piano, flutes, oboe, clarinet and guitars under the musical direction of Wallace Woodley.

Included in liturgical elements were music compositions, hymn texts and a prayer written by present and former presbyters and parishioners; and the church family recognised the historical selfless service and dedication of Property Steward, David Peach, in the award of a Certificate of Achievement presented by Rev Peter Taylor.

After an informal luncheon, a Festival of Music included items from the augmented choir, soloist Alex Robinson, clarinettist Barbara Peddie, student pianist Minori Naoi, and Trio des Aquarelles (a prize-winning chamber ensemble from Burnside High School). The programme of music represented composers drawn from the past 200 years to the present day.

A Heritage Table displayed historical artefacts such as church choir recordings, previous history books, printed orders of service for significant occasions, and an article detailing the ancient Māori land story of the Aldersgate site. Also on show was a collage created by the church family children depicting sky, mountains, trees, birds and a beach foreshore. It was made during the wintertime series of lessons on the traditional Māori myth, 'Rekindling the Vā of Papatūānuku'.



Hīkoi; a movement of the people, for the people

Rev Keita Hotere

In this Advent season, the moments of joy and celebration among the people give us hope and promise for a better Aotearoa New Zealand. This month's reflection explores the gift of hīkoi. While some see hīkoi as a protest march, journey, pilgrimage, it is much more. Hīkoi is a movement of the people, for the people—a voice for all New Zealanders expressing how they choose to live their lives.

As Weteriana, we undertake the biennial hīkoi for our Hui Tōpū conference gathering in-person, alternating with online gatherings. This year's Hui Tōpū we met in Te Whanganui-a-Tara and the day began with a pōwhiri and the induction of Te

Aroha Rountree, our first lay wāhine Māori as President. The following day, Te Taha Māori celebrated the ordination of Rev. Hoana Flay from Taitokerau Rohe. It was a humble moment of reflection for our Te Taha Māori whānau as we remembered those who had been part of their journey and the journey still before us.

The Te Taha Māori report on the floor of Conference emphasized our commitment to climate justice. Standing in solidarity with grassroots communities, we highlighted Taranaki Rohe members participating in a Pātea hīkoi to oppose seabed mining off the Pātea coast. The government's fast-tracking legislation appears to prioritize corporate investment and exploitation of natural resources over the needs of the Taiao and Tangata living in this Rohe.

Hui Tōpū has voiced opposition to the Treaty Principles Bill. Members from throughout the Connexion gathered in Te Whanganui-a-Tara as the Hīkoi mō Te Tiriti and joined the protest march to Paremata (Parliament Grounds). Supported by many Tangata Whenua and Taiwi, this hīkoi united people from different backgrounds against the proposed bill.

Hīkoi not only calls us into fellowship with one another; it transforms us in the process. Although it was a hīkoi of opposition, it spoke volumes more about being a force for unification of peoples on an unprecedented scale in Aotearoa.

Below is an inoi taking us through a medley of *kara* flag symbolism on the day.

Te Tiriti Protects us all
Together For Te Tiriti
Nōku Tēnei Whenua Nōku Tupuna
Never ceded sovereignty
We are the Taonga
Mana 2 Mana Toa Mana Tiriti
Mō Ngā Mokopuna Tamariki
Toitū Te Tiriti Free Palestine
Decolonise stop Settler Colonialism
Tangata Tiriti standing with Tangata Whenua
Can't spell Kiwi without Iwi
Te Tiriti isn't a Magna Doodle
Kill The Bill
Whina walked so we could run
Have Mana Like Hana
Mana Motuhake driven Mokopuna focused
Ake ake ake



Inter-church Bioethics Council Consider Several Issues

Rev David Bush

The Inter-Church Bioethics Council (ICBC), a partnership of Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, was formed in 2002 to bring the churches' response to the Royal Commission on Genetic modification. Over the years, that brief has expanded.

Might it be possible to change critical genes in cows to reduce greenhouse gases, or in grass to enhance drought resilience or in insect pests to make them sterile? Could the wilding pine problem be solved by creating trees which do not produce seeds? Could some human genetic diseases be cured through gene editing? The answer is not 'if' but rather whether it is ethical or appropriate to use such technology.

Ethics, according to Wikipedia "are agreed moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity".

Genetic engineering is back on the agenda as the Government has announced its intention to allow GE to be more widely used in New Zealand. Additional items on ICBC's agenda include the review of the End-of-Life Choices Act, the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and climate change.

ICBC sees its role as seeking to understand the impact of proposed legislation and to respond through a lens of Christian practice and theology. We read research papers, consider what is happening in other parts of the world and ask about the impact in New Zealand.

Genetic Engineering

In 2002 ICBC asked for caution in the roll out of GE which was the position adopted by Government. We now agree that it is timely to review that legislation. Not only have there been significant advances in genetic engineering; some of the fears have not eventuated. Even so, GE is frontier science which is not without significant risk so it is important there are agreed principles which govern the use of GE.

For example, would seedless pine trees continue to be safe for all generations to come? What would happen if it was no longer possible to get viable seed to protect generic diversity? Will GE in health care benefit everyone or will those who cannot pay lose out? What if cows genetically modified to reduce carbon emissions suffered from major health problems in the future?

The ICBC is concerned about the suggestion that there will not be 'ethics clauses' in the new legislation. ICBC views this as a serious mistake since it does not give protection from future risky means of genetic modification, from uses of the technology which give minimal benefit or ensure that any proposed use is carefully reviewed before approval is given.

There is no doubt that GE will continue to develop. ICBC hopes its use is carefully planned. It is expected that a select committee will consider the proposed regulations for GE early in 2025.

End-of-life Choices Act Review

In November 2021 the End-of-Life Choices Act came into being. The Act allows a person 18 years of age or older with a terminal illness likely to end their life within 6 months to seek access to assisted dying. More than 2,500 people have sought an assisted death with some 940 being approved. This shows that the approval process is robust and not taken lightly. The three-year review into the operation of the Act has just been published click [here](#).

There seems to be a focus on those who were not able to access an assisted death. It is expected that legislation will come to Parliament through Members Bills to address some of these matters. An ACT member already has a bill drafted to remove the six month clause. ICBC is concerned that this changes the nature from 'end of life' to ending life due to disease or disability which is what is happening in Canada and the Netherlands.

While there is no compulsion to use the provisions of the End-of-Life Choices Act, those who wish to die a natural death sadly do not always have 'choice'. To have real choice there needs to be access to effective palliative care. These services through hospices cost \$186 million in 2022 with only 50 percent funding coming from the Government. Are people seeking assisted dying because palliative care is not readily accessible, or because what is available does not address the pain they are anticipating or experiencing?

If any update of legislation is necessary ICBC would say it is in the provision of effective palliative care for all who need it. A letter to your Member of Parliament asking for palliative care provision is a helpful way to respond.

Climate Change

Climate change poses a significant threat to biological systems. Increased temperatures will increase the range of tropical diseases into areas where plants and animals have no natural resistance. Heatwaves already threaten life in warmer countries.

This is an ethical issue. It is the lifestyles of the richer nations and the wealthy which continue to feed greenhouse gases into the environment. Ethics calls on the vulnerable to be protected. New Zealand's per capita greenhouse production is very high. ICBC calls for policies that help New Zealanders reduce emissions and encourage us to examine our lifestyles and decisions to make them as sustainable as possible.

Ethics may seem to be a matter which belongs somewhere else. Where experts seek to decide the boundaries which apply to any part of life. However, every decision we make has ethical consequences. The question before ICBC and us all is 'how can we live an ethical life?'



MERI KIRIHIMETE

Jim's Cartoon

Brendan Boughen

Our regular cartoon that seeks to find the funny side of faith.





Epworth Retreat and Recreation Centre Celebrate 75 Years

Margaret Birtles

Over Labour weekend people came to Waikato from near and far to celebrate 75 years of Epworth providing camping, retreat and recreation facilities. For those who had a variety of connexions to the camp, it was a time of catching up, sharing memories and enjoying fellowship together.

The Finlay family gifted the land in 1949, and the dedication and first Easter Camp was celebrated in 1951. We acknowledge the extremely generous gift that Arthur and Dawn Finlay gave us, allowing so many others, past and present, to enjoy this long-standing and unique retreat.

Over the years, many volunteers have given their time or invested financially in the developments that have taken place. With their commitment and support, Epworth is the beautiful facility we have today. We acknowledge all those who have come and gone before us.

Owned by the Methodist Church of New Zealand and managed under the direction of the Waikato/Waiariki Synod, Epworth operates as an affordable Christian accommodation facility. It is set on 12 acres beside the Waikato River /upper catchment of Lake Karapiro and maintains and utilises two acres of water frontage. Ideally suited for water sports, Epworth is particularly popular with school rowing groups, school camps, family and corporate gatherings.

Historical records relating to Epworth, sourced from the Methodist Archives, were on display over the weekend along with a collection of photos from those involved. The celebrations included several speeches sharing about the camp's history, and its present popularity and connection with the Methodist synod. It was good to also recognise the place of the wider church, which was shared by Methodist Vice President Te Rito Peyroux-Semu. The Hamilton East Tongan brass band entertained and accompanied the singing of two hymns - *Love Divine* and *These Hills* - carefully chosen to emphasize the history as well as the present place of the camp in the church's life.

A special cake was cut by the youngest - Theo and his mum Jennifer Viggers (a staff member) - and oldest guest Carol Snadden (involved with her late husband Ron over many years). A book had been printed telling the Epworth story, where people could also write their stories. A tea towel, featuring the Epworth emblem, was given to all who attended. Looking to the future, a sod of soil was turned and a bench with a plaque unveiled, in recognition of a new accommodation development about to start.

We acknowledged two people who are completing their time with Epworth; Ingrid Laxon has been manager for 13 years and Rev Susan Thompson who has been chairperson of the management committee for 15 years. Epworth is grateful for their diligent work and commitment.

We extend a special thanks to Ingrid and her team. Prior to the gathering much work had been done to present the grounds in peak condition and staff had worked tirelessly, setting up a programme to ensure those who attended had a pleasant experience and were well nourished.

If you haven't visited Epworth, we would encourage you to put it on your 'to do' list.



The Priority of Ministry with Seniors

Rev Andrew Doubleday, UCANZ Facilitator

So many of our churches are populated almost exclusively by 'Gold Card' holders. Why would we imagine that seeking to appeal to young families and youth is a great idea? Or that it's what God requires of us?

I've been in the middle of a church split. At the end of 1998, four years into my time at Opawa, the congregation split. While the split was numerically, right down the middle, its divide was largely generational. Most of the youth group and young families went off and formed, what didn't take too long before it became the largest church in Christchurch – Grace Vineyard. Those of us who remained, reflected the older demographic.

For years we tried to reclaim what we had lost – not the specific people, they had moved on – a new group of young families, young people. 'Seeker Friendly' seemed to offer a way forward. We had good music and leadership resources. What we lacked were younger people and children.

We (I), were slow learners. They weren't coming back. While we consistently might have one or two families who would hang in there with us for a few years, ultimately, as the kids hit their teens, these families tended to move on. We ran a small youth group. Yet, we never achieved sufficient momentum, or critical mass. Young people and young families like to be where young people and young families are.

I've yet to see an aged congregation regrow downward to ultimately become primarily populated with the young. I still hear the occasional church leader (usually at national or regional level) express confidence that we're up to the task. And even if they don't say it, when one listens to the hopes and dreams of congregational leaders, such a vision for many is clearly still front and centre. The reality is that the price of change required for such a transition is simply too high. The extent of the sacrifices needed to be made by the elderly would be such a violation of who they are, that it's better to recognise this before the venture is started. It may not quite qualify as 'Mission Impossible', but it certainly comes into the category of 'Mission Extremely Difficult'.

Eventually we turned toward what and who we had – away from what and who we didn't have. We accepted that we were an aging congregation. There were two possible pathways ahead for us. 1. We had the capacity to provide an environment and resources for a new congregation, a younger congregation to start their own life, separate, yet alongside us - staffed / resourced by the kind of people they were seeking to reach – young people like themselves. As they took root under the shelter of our branches, they would grow, while we would diminish – ultimately taking our place as the church in this place. While we explored this option, it didn't take root. The group we were considering hosting went elsewhere – probably all for the best.

2. We would orient ourselves toward reaching older people. People like us. We recognised that ministry with older people needed to be a priority. This is the path we took. Acknowledging that as we age we are increasingly facing life's biggest challenge – the end of it.

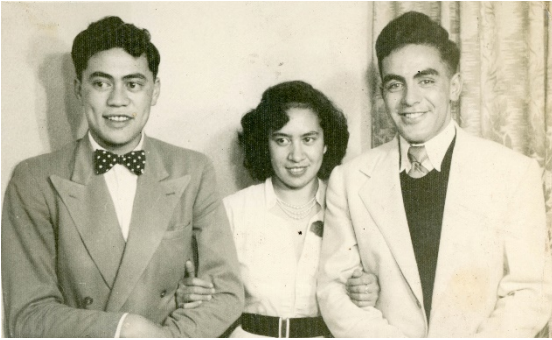
And given the high proportion of teenagers who have had a 'come-to-Jesus' experience, yet walk away from the Church in their twenties and thirties, who's going to be there to pick them up later, maybe decades, down the track? We needed to see the urgency of such a ministry.

I've come to a settled place in my own life in seeking to recognise what God is doing. When Jesus, in John 5:20 says "I only do what I see the Father doing" I've come to the most likely conclusion that 'what the father was doing' was what was happening in his own life. If our church is populated by seniors, then we can move forward confident that ministry with seniors is what God is doing.

Given the death-defying, death-denying, nature of the age and culture in which we find ourselves, the opportunities and urgency of ministry with the aging can be the most rewarding pathway for churches such as ours. We simply surrender the ground for ministry with the young to those who are better equipped for it. This allows us to focus on those people who are like us, and whose needs for community and ministry we are most likely able to meet. What we can be confident in is that we continue to make older people. I'm becoming one of them.



LOOKING BACK



“What a great photograph. I wonder who it is.”

Susan Garwood, Digital Content Curator Presbyterian Archives

As you gather with whanau at Christmas we encourage you to pull out the old family photographs and invite relatives to help with labelling images where there is little information provided.

A surprising number of images are donated to the Presbyterian Research Centre with minimal information. Often, we can guess the name of someone or the location of the image but frequently this information remains unknown. Even if you have no intention of donating your photos to an archive, the number one reason family photos end up in antique stores or worse, discarded by the next generation, is because no one recognizes the faces in the image.

Looking through the images may flush out family stories that make you laugh or reminisce on long forgotten memories or moments in time. Be sure to have a pencil nearby to write those stories down and to record the names of those recognised in the images.

Label the image, in pencil, on the back, at an edge if possible. Include details such as the full name of as many people in the image as possible. Don't write "Aunt Sarah", even if she's sitting next to you. Instead write the first and last name, at least. Add a place or the date the image was taken, and if possible, the occasion / reason for the photograph. For example, is it a picture of Aunt Sarah's 50th birthday party? Add that detail too.

Digital Images

It is important to label your digital photos as well. Consider changing the photo name to something like "2005_Sarah Smith_50th Birthday". This will not only identify the image but will also help you search for it as well. Don't forget to identify your immediate family, even ones that include yourself. Remember, you're doing this for your grandchildren or that great-great grandnephew whose parent hasn't been born yet.

This is a good task to do for your congregation's photos as well. Place some photos on a table after Sunday services and ask everyone to see if they can identify the event or people pictured. Older parish members may be the best source of information and would likely enjoy sharing stories of the past as well.

If not at Christmas, consider labelling family photos as a New Year's resolution. There is no better way to preserve your family (or congregation's) history than to add names to the images. That way your photo collection can continue to tell your family story, for generations to come.

The image above was deposited with the PRC, labelled, "Bully, Jean, Myself at Jean's 21st." As it came from an organisation, it wasn't clear who "Myself" was. With help from others, we now know "Myself" is Rev Tame Hawea, "Jean" is Mrs. Jean Hawea (nee Ngatai), and this was taken at Jean's 21st birthday party, May 1953. We still don't know who "Bully" is.