



God's Pacific People & Institute for Research and Social Analysis

NEWSLETTER

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Inside this issue:

<i>A Platform for Ecumenical Relations and Cooperation in Papua New Guinea</i>	3
<i>Leadership and Management Training, Honiara</i>	4
<i>Divali—The Festival of Lights</i>	6
<i>Rebirth—A Mother's Call to Renewal</i>	7
<i>Male Advocacy for EVAW</i>	8
<i>Pacific Peacebuilding Intensive</i>	9
<i>Research Updates</i>	10
<i>Family – the need to appreciate its sacredness</i>	12
<i>Highlights and Upcoming Events</i>	14
<i>Our Contact</i>	15

Editorial: New Beginnings for GPP&IRSA

By Aisake Casimira

With deep gratitude, we thank the member churches who requested and have worked with us during the year. It has been a year full of creative possibilities and deep losses.

In July, we sadly farewelled Professor Manfred Ernst as he retired back to his new home in Germany. In August and with profound sadness, we also farewelled the mother of the College, Rev. Rosalyn Nokise, who passed on to eternal life with God. Two former Directors – Professor Ernst with the Institute for Research and Social Analysis (IRSA) and the late Rev. Rosalyn Nokise with the God's Pacific People (GPP) Programme – with one vision: to assist the Pacific churches with their mission and stewardship task of bringing about 'well-being' and 'wholeness of life' to their people. Two extremely gifted and passionate leaders who deeply believed that building the capacity of the churches in leadership and management, peace-building, pastoral counselling, and social analysis, and through the provision of research findings, will greatly assist the churches to be 'dynamic' presences in the Pacific,

especially on matters that confront their people. Two prophets who firmly believed in the prophetic voice of the church, speaking about compassion and truth, against injustices and speaking for the care of the least among us.

Both, however, left behind a vision and purpose, and lessons in commitment that have become the platform for us to build and by which we will remember the legacy they left behind. Since the PTC's Executive resolution in April to integrate the leadership and management of the two programmes (GPP and IRSA), the work on integration started in July and through to October with a series of meetings and discussions, mostly among the staff on the following issues:

- joint vision and mission
- composition and terms of reference of the one Advisory Committee
- the institutional framework that will guide the integration process
- structures on programmes, and institutional management and accountability
- internal policies and guidelines on

finances, working relations and communications

- and financial plan for an integrated programme.

Much of the work on these was done and the outcomes were endorsed by the respective governing bodies of PCC and PTC. The tremendous support of the governing bodies on these issues was the key factor in the progress made on the integration of GPP and IRSA in the last six months.

Beginning in January 2017, the GPP Programme and the IRSA will be managed and operated under a new Institutional Framework, **Institute for Mission and Research (IMR)**. This new Institutional Framework contains the overall vision for the new Institute which is 'well-being' and 'wholeness of life', and stewardship as the guiding and organizing concept for programmes, and an understanding of mission and approach to mission and theology. With the endorsement of the PCC and PTC Executive committees of this new Institute name at their respective November meetings, the staff of both programmes are looking forward to working closely with the member churches of PCC and PTC. Moving forward, however, will require a process of consolidation which we will begin at the end of this year and into the next two years.

One of the key tasks for the new Institute is to assist the development of a missiology programme for the Pacific Churches at PTC. This is an exciting venture as it offers the possibilities of developing a

programme that is unique in the Pacific insofar as theological education and mission praxis is concerned. The form this will take will be the subject of planning and discussions between the PTC academic programmes on Church Ministry, Theology and Ethics and the PTCEE extension programme, and with PCC. We hope to present the outcome to the governing bodies of PTC and PCC in 2018. Another important task for the new Institute is to assist both PTC and PCC with their core task of facilitating and strengthening ecumenical relations and cooperation. The new Institute, because it is jointly owned by PTC and PCC, can help to facilitate and further the progress of the one ecumenical council proposal that the PCC Assembly in 2013 tasked PCC and PTC to look into. We look forward to assisting the PCC secretariat and the College on these two key tasks in the coming years and for the support of the member churches, especially the leadership of the churches, in these endeavors. The College feast and the graduation brought to an end a successful academic year for the College. One of the highlights of the graduation was the graduation speech by the guest speaker, Rev. Caroline Amy Chambers, on violence against women and girls and the need for the churches to take a proactive stance against it. The other highlight was the presentation of the song 'Rosalina' which was especially composed for the late Rev. Rosalyn Nokise by Rev. Dr. Upolu Va'ai. The song epitomised the high re-

gard she was held by students, past and present, and those who crossed her path in her 18 years at the College.

We wish to deeply acknowledge the enormous contribution of the members of the two advisory committees – the Advisory Committee for GPP and the Strategic Think Tank for IRSA. We want to sincerely thank all the members for their tremendous service to the churches in the Pacific through GPP and IRSA. They contributed much to the development of both these respective programmes with their wisdom, experience and expertise. The committees were formally closed with an evening function on the 6th December that was held especially to acknowledge and thank them. Beginning in January 2017, there will only be one Advisory Committee for both programmes.

Lastly, as we prepare for the seasons of Advent and Christmas, we take this opportunity to thank the Principal, the faculty members and the support staff of the College for the tremendous support and advice toward the integration process over the course of the last six months. We also thank member churches most sincerely all the support rendered to the successful conduct of training workshops throughout the year.

Be assured of our prayers for the mission work of your churches and for God's abundant blessings during these Advent and Christmas seasons!

A Platform for Ecumenical Relations and Cooperation in Papua New Guinea

Four member churches of the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) – Papua New Guinea Bishops' Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, United Church Papua New Guinea and the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea – came together from the 18th – 21st of October for a consultation on “Rethinking Ecumenical Relations and Cooperation in Papua New Guinea”. The consultation was jointly organized by the Melanesian Institute (MI) and the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) with the kind support of the Association of Protestant Churches in Germany and Bread for the World. The consultation was held at the MI in Goroka and facilitated by Mr. Aisake Casimira of PTC.

The main purpose of the consultation was to search for a new way of relating and cooperating well with each other as churches. The keynote address was delivered by the Head Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in PNG, Bishop Jack Urame. In light of the developmental challenges (outlined by Bishop Urame and iterated by the plenary sessions) including the influence of



Above: Consultation participants at MI.

the new religious movements in the politics of PNG, the churches may do well to search for new ways of relating and cooperating on the issues confronting their people.

The two major outcomes of the consultation were: **(a) a statement on a new vision, mission and goals for reconfiguration and conceptualization of ecumenical relations and cooperation among the member churches of the PNGCC; and, (b) a statement of solidarity and church action within PNG on West Papua's self-determination struggle.** The first outcome laid the platform for further consultations, analysis and articulation of possible new forms of ecumenical relations and cooperation among the churches. It is hoped that these will not only consolidate new forms of ecumenical relations and cooperation, it will also help to rebuild confidence and trust among the member churches in PNG, and subsequently, strengthen the churches' dream of “one voice”, contributing towards the common good (or *gutpela sindaun*).

Some of the key developmental challenges highlighted were the following:

(i) Family issues such as divorce, marriage break-ups and the realignment of family loyalties as determined by economic and financial power. As more and more people move to the urban centres in PNG,



Above: Welcoming of the consultation participants.

family ties and the social norms that once governed their lives in the villages are less important than the security of one's economic strength. In addition, there is continual tension between the old forms of religion and the new, such as witchcraft and the lack of a concerted ecumenical response to this. Crime and violence in urban areas were seen as manifestations of the breakdown in social norms.

(ii) The influence of the new religious movements, especially their brand of theology in the political policy-making spaces and decisions in Papua New Guinea has become a real worry. The political prominence and reception accorded to the King James Bible, and the stripping of the traditional and cultural artifacts from inside Parliament were some examples shared. There is a close connection between religious fundamentalism and neo-liberal economics. The preaching of the ‘prosperity gospel’ most often used by the new religious groups in PNG was seen as the one of the driving forces for the deliberate ecological damage that has been done through such

developmental activities as mining.

(iii) West Papua's struggle for political independence and the West Papua churches' supportive role in the movement challenge the PNG churches to revisit the rephrased question "whom am I a neighbour to?" Solidarity with churches in West Papua and what can the churches in PNG do internally with their government and people to express in action what this solidarity means.

These and other developmental issues presented real challenges to

ecumenical relations in PNG. These challenges are mostly in the form of collective analysis, both in terms of content and agreed moral positions on such issues, and concrete proposals for an ecumenical response from the churches. In addition to these and perhaps more fundamental was the lack of an effective coordinating body for ecumenical relations and cooperation. For over ten years and until recently the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches (PNGCC) has been dormant and largely ineffective, due mainly to oversight problems and issues of

financial mismanagement. This, regrettably, affected the ecumenical relations and cooperation among the member churches and fundamentally the trust and confidence of the member churches with the Council. However, with the appointment of a new General Secretary in early October, it is hoped that ecumenical relations and cooperation among the member members of the PNGCC will improve. We wish the PNG Churches well in their noble intention and endeavor to rebuild and to find new ways of relating with one another and coop-



Left: Signing of the statements by the Heads and Representatives of the four PNG churches, PCC and EMW



Right: Head Bishop Urame of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea makes a point during discussions.

Leadership and Management Workshop—Solomon Islands

By: *Lynne Lala*

The leadership and management training was conducted in the capital city of Honiara at the request of the Anglican Church of Melanesia (ACoM) from the 3rd – 14th October 2016. The General Secretary of ACoM, Dr. Abraham Hauriasi acknowledged the importance of such training as it helps equip their leaders, staff, and managers, principals of schools and diocese secretaries

with the skills and knowledge to have the capacity to better run their departments, schools and dioceses.

It was a two weeks workshop attended by 2 different groups. The first week was for heads of department diocese Secretaries from some of the provinces, Melanesian Brotherhood, the Anglican Sisters, and a few teachers from the ACoM schools in Honiara. A total of 28 people participated in the first week

of which 5 were women and 23 were men.

The second week of training focused primarily on primary and secondary school teachers, Principals of the schools, school chaplains some of whom are also board members of the education section of the ACoM; of the 22 participants, 7 were women and 15 were men.

The facilitators for the workshop were Rev Dr. Edward Kolohai, Lecturer at Bishop Patterson Theological College, Mr Paulo Baleinakorodawa (independent peacebuilding-consultant) Ms Chantelle Khan, (Director - Social Empowerment Education Programme (SEEP)), Mr Aisake Casimira (Director – GPP/IRSA) and Mr Geoffrey Nainoca (independent financial consultant).

The course was delivered keeping the participants in mind – being adult learners. The idea was to also learn from the deep insights from their experience in their own respective fields as business managers, heads of departments, finance managers, clergies and teachers and weave their experiences into the workshop material.

Presentations by facilitators were in forms of power point presentations, lectures, panel discussions, and there was also group work whereby there were discussions and

presentations by the participants. Participants also shared their own struggles, their own real-life situations and scenarios.

Participants acknowledged that the workshop has fulfilled their expectations. They have also affirmed that most of the learning that took place in the two weeks has been very helpful, very enriching, very challenging and the new ideas learnt will help them improve their work within their organizations and communities.

Some of the key learning from this whole workshop were as follows:

- Increased understanding of effective leadership.
- A wider scope of understanding project management.
- Better understanding and knowledge of essential finance skills.
- Importance of proper policies and procedures.

- Understanding transparency and accountability

- A good understanding of biblical principles of leadership.

- Good leadership styles and management practices

One important feedback that has been received from the participants is that this kind of training needs to continue as it touches the core issues they have within their communities, schools, and work places and how to address them. The participants would like to see further training and follow ups happen in the near future.

We thank the Anglican Church of Melanesia, especially Dr. Abraham Hauriasi for inviting GPP/IRSA to run the training in Honiara. It has been a wonderful experience being part of the workshop and we are indeed grateful and we look forward to working together again in future.



Above: A Group photo of participants and facilitators of the first week of the LM workshop – Heads of Departments of the Anglican Church of Melanesia.



Above: A Group photo of participants of the second week of the workshop from the Anglican Church of Melanesia Schools - Principals, teachers and school chaplains.

DIWALI -The Festival of Lights

By Rima Sivanjali

Diwali, “the Festival of Lights”, is one of the most colorful, sacred and loveliest festivals of the Hindus. It is celebrated every year with great joy and enthusiasm. Such is the euphoria over Diwali celebrations that even the non-Hindu population participates in fun and celebrations related to the festival of Diwali. The excitement for Diwali Festival in Fiji is heightened further due to the fact that Diwali is celebrated as a public holiday in Fiji (this year it was celebrated on the 31st of October).

Just as in India, people of Fiji celebrate Diwali with elaborate lighting and candle decorations. Families take this time to reaffirm the bonds shared with loved ones by exchanging greetings, sweets and gifts of love. Diwali also gives an opportunity to people of different faith and communities to come together and live in a spirit of communal har-

mony. Diwali just isn't a day's celebration but Hindus have five days of rituals that lead to the final Diwali day. On the first day of Diwali, people consider it auspicious to spring clean the home and shop for gold or kitchen utensils. On the second day, people decorate their homes with clay lamps and create design patterns called *rangoli* on the floor using colored powders or sand. The third day is the main day of the festival when families gather together for *Lakshmi puja*, a prayer to Goddess Lakshmi followed by feasts and firework festivities. The fourth day is the first day of the New Year when friends and relatives visit with gifts and best wishes for the season.

On the last day of Diwali, brothers visit their married sisters who welcome them with love and a lavish meal. According to the Hindu religious belief, Goddess Lakshmi, who

is the goddess of wealth, pays a visit to each house on the night of the Diwali. She bestows her blessings on the houses that are neat and clean. Lamps are lit everywhere to remove evil from homes and welcome the God and Goddess.

So help us celebrate Diwali every year by lighting a lamp of love, blasting the chain of sorrow, shooting a rocket of prosperity, firing a flowerpot of happiness and wishing everyone a sparkling Diwali!

*Some parts have been quoted from



<http://www.importantindia.com/7605/short-essay-on-diwali-festival/>



Rebirth Fiji: A Mother's Call to Renewal

By Rusila Nabouniu

"... the message of renewal is about asking our Pacific people to return to the core of the Christian faith — love of God and love of neighbour, and that our way of stewardship is totally different from the way of "empire".

Rev. James Bhagwan in "Renewed call for rebirth", *Fiji Times Online*, 2016.

The Rebirth Fiji Concert that was coordinated by the Pacific Conference of Churches in September was a captivating and effective platform for the Moana Loa Performing Arts, Fiji youth Choir and the Solomon Voices to advocate on the need to reconcile with our mother earth.

The GPP Programme and the Institute of Research and Social Analysis were blessed to be among the people in attendance for the premiering



Students of Draiba Fijian Primary School pose with the Rebirth Fiji Poster

night on the 25th of September. The young enthusiastic performers like sharp arrows pierced the soul of the audience into an awareness of our Pacific issues like never before. Other performances were dedicated especially to Primary school students from around Suva: St Anne Primary, Draiba Primary, Suva Methodist Primary, Veiuto Primary and Stella Maris Primary, just to name a few. Other performances were open to the general public.

We received positive feedback from all that witnessed the concert. The audience found the approach of performing arts as method of educating and advocating the message of renewal to be effective to the younger generation in particular as they expressed how the message hit home for them. A Year 8 teacher of St. Anne's Primary mentioned the relevance of the themes portrayed in Rebirth concert to the Social Studies curriculum... *"the message of renewal is a powerful one and well presented through traditional dance, song and poetry and students were able to make connect and link what they had learnt in the classroom..."*. Moreover, a youth mentioned the need to replicate the rebirth concert in other communities



Above: Students of Veiuto Primary School take two as they wait to be ushered into the Civic Auditorium.

in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries, to take ownership of the reality that our Pacific is faced with ... *"the concert is really good and it's a shame that only the people in Suva and Nadi will get a chance to see it, this should also be performed in other towns and cities, not only in Fiji but other countries in the Pacific too..."*.

The Rebirth concert came as a timely event given the rising ecological crisis, human degradation and social issues at large in the Pacific. We hear, see and read so much about it on the various platforms of mass media to the extent where we have grown passive and our social action, critical thinking and social analysis wanes with our growing ignorance. Let's rise to one accord embracing our diversity and be the light to one another as we lobby towards reweaving that which has been broken in our Pacific.

Male Advocacy for Eliminating Violence Against Women

By Rev. Raki Tigarea

The Male Advocacy training was held on the 18th-22nd June at the Methodist Church Epworth Hall in the capital Fiji, Suva.

The program was organized by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Gods Pacific People (GPP) and delivered by the Fiji Women's Crisis centre (FWCC). It recognized that gender roles and gender relations are intertwined with cultural, religious, economic, political and social circumstances. They are based on the idea that gender relations are not static and can be changed.

The male advocacy course calls to mind the nature of partnerships between women and men. When confronting issues of gender based violence, men are part of the problem and also need to be part of the solution.

The workshop sought to increase men's and boys' involvement in new initiatives that promote gender equity, equality and women's empowerment. The aim was to increase men's comfort with seeing themselves as responsible, caring, and non-violent partners. They also recognized the diversity of men's reproductive and sexual health needs, including those of young men, and those who are economically deprived or displaced.

Men often wield enormous power over many aspects of women's lives, as heads of state and government

ministers, as leaders of religious and faith-based institutions, as judges, as heads of militaries and militias, as village leaders, or indeed as husbands and fathers.

It is also often men who control access to reproductive health information and services, finances, transportation and other resources. And too often, it is men alone who make decisions about sexual relationships, the timing and frequency of sexual activity, and the use of contraceptives. Some men even impose these choices through coercion or violence.

At the same time, young men and boys are future partners, community members and leaders and as such, reaching them with programs that promote gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors is key to ensuring the future is free of gender-based discrimination. Clearly, men need to be involved if gender equality is to be achieved and reproductive health programs are to succeed. Research also shows that men want to be involved, and that many welcome the idea of mutually satisfying relationships built on trust and communication.

The work in the field also shows that male leaders can become valuable allies in addressing reproductive health issues, from maternal mortality to violence against women. Evidence also shows that young men are more receptive than

their older counterparts to greater equality.

Ideas about manhood are deeply ingrained. From an early age, boys may be socialized into gender roles designed to keep men in power and in control. Many are conditioned to believe that dominant behavior towards girls and women is part of being 'a man'.

Risk-taking and aggressive sexual behavior on the part of young men are often applauded by peers and condoned by society on some level. These stereotypes result in harm to both women and men, and erode possibilities of establishing satisfying, mutually respectful relationships. Boys and young men can be encouraged to reflect upon and discuss issues surrounding masculinity, relationships and sexuality, which can contribute to the deconstruction of negative, high-risk and sometimes harmful attitudes.

This recent male advocacy training workshop was the first part of a series of advocacy trainings to continued in 2017. Male advocates were reminded that: "Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business, Stop Violence Against Women" and also the words of the English Statesman Edmond Burke who once said "All that is needed of evil to triumph is for enough good men and women to do nothing."

Pacific Peacebuilding Training Intensive—Port Moresby, PNG

By Rev. Raki Tigarea

The Pacific Peacebuilding Training Intensive (PPTI) that took place in the capital city of Port Moresby from the 14th-25th of November, 2016 was coordinated in collaboration with the Waigani United Church. This was the first Pacific Peacebuilding Training Intensive run by GPP to be held in-country, as previously most trainings were delivered at a regional level based in Suva, Fiji.

Altogether 38 participants attended the training, it was gender balanced. There was equal representation between the clergy and laity. Participants came from far and wide; some from the highlands however majority of the participants were from the capital. University Chaplains from the University of PNG, University of Madang, University of Lae, and the Chaplain for higher education attended the training with ministers of the Church and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding.

The training was possible through the cost-sharing agreement negotiated between GPP and the United Church of Papua New Guinea (UCPNG) specifically Waigani Circuit and the Development Unit of UCPNG. It was delivered by Transcend Oceania (TO).

The training was designed effectively towards strategies that intervene and transform conflicts for building peace requires a comprehensive understanding of conflict from a range of perspectives.

The first three days were spent on introducing participants to the field of conflict analysis in social conflicts.

Days 4-6 provided a framework to assist participants to recognize that awareness in trauma healing is essential for any peacebuilding processes and offered ways to integrate this knowledge and skills into their work. The course covered three main sections. The first section

looked at distinguishing the various types of trauma and the effects on individuals and communities. The second section looked at identifying situations of trauma and resilience for individual and communal stories. The role of the body, brain and spirit in trauma. The relationship between unhealed traumas, cycles of violence, identified acting in and acting out behaviors. The third section looked at studying the trauma healing journey model and analyzing it in light of one's own insights, learning new skills to address trauma at various stages. Discussing what reconciliation means and what forgiveness means.

Days 7-10 focused on skill-building for effective problem solving. This enables intensive practice and the chance to incorporate skills in problem-solving role plays. They learned about power and its relationship to conflict, the importance of developing options and ways to do that, and the many ways to help overcome the impasse in negotiation.

Participants stated that what they found most interesting is learning new skills and tools for facilitating peace building.



Above: Participants and facilitators pose for a group photo at the training venue.

Research Updates: Fiji's Changing Religious Landscape

By Manfred Ernst and Anna Anisi

The data and analysis presented here is excerpted from an unpublished article entitled 'Ecumenism in Fiji: Crises and Opportunity', which is soon to be published through IRSA in 2017. The purpose in providing this sort of information is to make the churches aware of their status in relation to available statistics and information.

The main reasons for changes in religious affiliation in Fiji and the Pacific Islands were summarised in a journal article by Manfred Ernst in 2012. The author describes the Pacific as a "microcosm" of global trends in Christianity which suggests an increasing diversification of new religious groups (NRGs) and a growing trend towards nationalism and denominationalism in an increasing globalizing climate. He draws a correlation between the rise of NRGs and the impacts of rapid social change in the Pacific since WWII, where underlying cultural beliefs and meeting members affective needs have played a role in the "rapid conversion" process.

There is clear evidence that the decline of the historic mainline churches is taking place at the expense of the newer churches or new religious groups. For example, the 2006 military coup, which caused a rift between the government and the Methodist Church in Fiji (MCF), has contributed to the decline in

membership of the Church. A major breakaway took place when a Methodist group, led by Pastor Atu Vulaono, started a "Souls to Jesus" crusade, leading to the registration of the New Methodist Church in 2006.

According to the latest available national census, the Methodist Church constituted 34.7 percent of the Christian population in Fiji in 2007, thereby making it the biggest denomination in Fiji. The average annual growth rate of the Methodist Church is 0.5 percent, which is below the annual growth rate of the population. The Methodist Church has lost members to the Assemblies of God, Every Home, Christian Outreach Centre, Christian Mission fellowship (CMF) and other newer churches.

The Anglican Church is also clearly under the growth rate of the population and has lost members to one or another group. The Roman Catholic Church, which is the second largest Christian group in Fiji, has experienced a growth slightly above the growth rate of the population. Higher growth rates have also been experienced by the Seventh-day Adventists, the Presbyterian Church, and in particular the Assemblies of God and other newer Christian churches. It has been observed that newer religious groups are growing mainly at the expense of the Methodist Church.

Hinduism accounts for 27.7 percent of the population and the annual growth rate over the last three decades is 0.7%, which is slightly below the average growth rate of the population. Adherents of Islam constitute about 6.3 percent of the population and the average annual growth over the last three years is 0.3 percent, which is also below the population growth rate which could be attributed as an effect of the impact of the coups since 1987 and the mass emigration rates which have occurred since then, and to some extent conversions as well.

Overall, it is observed that although there is an increase in the total number of Christian adherents (due mainly to overall population growth since the last census), some of the mainline churches are growing much slower than the new religious groups. Although the numbers do not yet indicate negative growth, the data shows that many bigger churches are struggling to grow when compared to the newer religious groups.

A search at the Fiji Registrar of Titles office indicated a total of 130 officially registered Christian churches, fellowships and ministries in Fiji. Given Fiji's relatively small population, this prolific increase in Christian groups since the 1980s is quite remarkable.

Table 1: Religious Affiliation 1986 - 2007

RELIGION	Census 2007	Census 2007	Census 1996	Census 1996	Census 1986	Census 1986
	adherents	%	adherents	%	adherents	%
All Nations	13294	1.6	—	—	—	—
Anglican	6328	0.8	6325	0.8	6048	0.8
Assemblies of God	47873	5.7	31072	4.0	16346	2.3
Baptist Convention	1772	0.2	1296	0.2	—	—
Christian Outreach Centre	1929	0.2	—	—	—	—
Every Home/ CMF	14180	1.7	5673	0.7	—	—
Fiji Gospel Churches	2835	0.3	1354	0.2	—	—
Jehovah's Witness	8450	1.0	6102	0.8	—	—
LDS (Mormons)	5126	0.6	3475	0.4	—	—
Methodist	290555	34.7	280628	36.2	262661	36.7
New Apostolic Church	5089	0.6	2593	0.3	—	—
Presbyterian	2907	0.3	383	0.05	443	0.06
Roman Catholic	76603	9.1	69320	8.9	62699	8.8
Salvation Army	1144	0.1	989	0.13	—	—
Seventh-Day Adventists	32370	3.9	22187	2.7	15213	2.1
other Christians	35087	4.2	18085	2.3	15042	2.1
Total Christian	545542	65.2	449482	58.0	378452	52.9
Baha'i Faith	586	0.06	563	0.07	—	—
Hindu	232103	27.7	261097	33.7	273088	38.1
Islam	52594	6.3	54323	7.0	56001	7.8
Sikh	2548	0.3	3076	0.4	4674	0.6
Confucian	309	0.04	365	0.05	82	0.01
Other Non Christian	1294	0.2	1039	0.13	378	0.05
No Religion, Not Stated	2295	0.3	5132	0.7	2700	0.4
Others Total	291729	34.8	325595	42.0	336923	47.1
Total Population	837271		775077		715375	

Table 2. Growth rates of different religious groups in Fiji from 1986-2007

	Total number	In %	Average per year
Total Population	+ 121896	+ 17.0%	+ 0.8%
Anglican Church	+ 280	+ 4.6%	+ 0.2%
Assemblies of God	+ 31527	+ 192.9%	+ 9.2%
Methodist Church	+ 27894	+ 10.6%	+ 0.5%
Presbyterian	+ 2464	+ 556.2%	+ 26.5%
Roman Catholic Church	+ 13904	+ 22.2%	+ 1.1%
Seventh-day Adventists	+ 17157	+ 112.8%	+ 5.4%
All other Christians	+ 20045	+ 133.3%	+ 6.3%
Hindus	+ 40985	+ 15.0%	+ 0.7%
Muslims	+ 3407	+ 6.1%	+ 0.3%
Sikhs	+ 2126	+ 45.5%	+ 2.2%
Confucian	+ 227	+ 276.8%	+ 13.2%
All non Christians	+ 45194	+ 13.4%	+ 0.6%

Family – the need to appreciate its sacredness

By Aisake Casimira

Family is one of the themes in the birth narrative of Jesus. Jesus did not appear out of the sky but was born into a human family, with a family tree that traced back to King David and beyond. He later discovered that he also had a wider family – the presence of the shepherds highlighted this from the beginning.

The fact that the Son of God was born into a human institution that has real human relationships: a father and a mother, a husband and a wife, parents and the child Jesus. Beyond that, there was also a world of human relationships: Jesus and his Apostles, Jesus with ‘sinners’, Jesus and the religious (and political) leaders, Jesus and non-Israelites. It also brings home the point that the institution of the family as the basic unit of society is not only sacred but also vulnerable, especially in our time.

Why is the family sacred? First, the human family is the image of the divine family – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and, hence, should try and live the relationships of love and oneness of the divine family. Second, the family carries the life-giving memories of those long gone, the hopes of those still living and the aspirations of those still to come. The family is like a historical book of events that have happened in society; the promises and hopes of those events, the lessons the family needs to learn and the val-

ues it needs to keep. These were passed on through stories, songs and dances from one generation to the next. In the process relationships were built, alliances formed and stories changed. But they sustained a sense of anchoring and permanence to the family through the passing of time.

But, perhaps, more now than ever before, the family is much more vulnerable, due mainly to the sheer pace of change in our society. Within a span of thirty years, since the political independence of most of our islands, much has happened to render the concept of family much more fragile. Incidences of depression, physical and sexual abuse of children and women, increasing drugs and alcohol abuse among our children resulting in some of the most despicable crimes, increasing suicide among our young people, abandoned children, family break-ups and single parent families are not symptoms of a society’s well-being.

Family is now the target of re-education and strengthening of government, religious and civil society sponsored programmes. We are told that the teachings and practices of decent human values start at home with the family, that proper work ethics to promote productivity and efficiency starts with the family, education of children and their support starts at

home. While there is truth to these, there is much wrong with it. We correctly assume that because the family is the basis of our society and is where values should be first taught, we thought that it is where our re-education and strengthening programmes must begin. But by doing so we isolate the family from the wider society and hence our efforts, while well-intentional, lack a fuller appreciation of the circumstances of the family in our time; that the family, like everything else, is subject to external forces, most notably economic and commercial value systems.

An increasingly consumer-driven and advertising-dominating society like ours militates daily against ongoing family and community attachments; the relationships and sense of belonging and loyalty we have for family members, friends and work mates. It is constantly inviting us to switch to a different brand or try something new, try a new relationship or go for a better deal elsewhere. As our society begins to be saturated by these commercial values, it may not be a surprise to find that our relationships are becoming temporary, our loyalties are becoming provisional and our commitments are becoming whimsical. It would, in short, be a society in which marriage makes little sense. By and large, this is what is happening.

Time is another factor that works against the family and its values – commitments, loyalties and relationships. When many of us are forced to work harder in the interest of efficiency and productivity, time that used to be spent with the family, friends and work mates is increasingly scarce. Moreover, efficiency and productivity without the principle of justice makes paid work much more insecure. Its very insecurity forces us to work harder in case next week or next month, we would no longer have a job. This is an added factor to an already stressed society, where the family bonds are less stable.

By and large, the increasing commercialisation of our society has left us free to choose almost everything: what to do; where to go; how to live and with whom. But that freedom simultaneously threatens to dissolve the very things that give us a sense of anchoring, permanence and dignity to life. Marriages become fragile, homes and jobs become less permanent. In

such situations, it becomes harder for many of us to find stable support at the very time we need them most. Politicians value us for our votes, advertisers for what we buy but who is left to value us for who we are?

Family is where most of us learn what it means to love, trust and where relationships of reciprocity and circles of friends are formed. For life to have personal meaning there must be people who matter to us, and for whom we matter, unconditionally. For most of us, the things that are most likely to make us happy are our marriage, our wives and husbands, our preferred vocation in life, our children, our brothers and sisters, our friends and our work mates. The ups and downs of these relationships make life meaningful and bearable knowing that in times of strife, we can always turn to these relationships to prop us up and sustain us. Lose these and we lose the very concept of happiness, of a life well-lived, of dedication to something much

larger than ourselves.

The birth of Jesus into a family alerts us not only to the fact that relationships are so important and therefore need to be nurtured and sustained, but also to its vulnerability – the rejection of the holy family and the physical condition in which the Son of God was born into were indications. This brings us home to the value of family. It also highlights the need to seriously consider the external forces that are also at play and which makes the family vulnerable; the forces that threaten to make the family a mere commodity of the market and a matter of commercial interest.

The challenge therefore is not so much the re-education and strengthening of the family because by and large parents and their children know what is needed. Rather, the grave challenge facing us is to ensure that economic and commercial values do not subsume the family and what it stands for. This may require forming basic family networks within and across religious, ethnic and cultural boundaries. The purpose would be to monitor, assess and take action on issues that negatively impact on the family.

We at the God's Pacific People and the Institute for Research and Social Analysis of the Pacific Theological College wish you all a very blessed Christmas and a New Year full of exciting possibilities!



Highlights at GPP-IRSA this quarter:

- Prayer Virgil held to honor lives lost in the struggle of West Papua, especially remembering the family of Rev. Hans.
- PTC 49th Graduation Ceremony - 10th November
- English Students return home after 3 months training course - 1st December.
- PTC and PCC final executive meetings of 2016.
- IMR Retreat with New Advisory members - 5th & 6th December



Upcoming Events:

- Official IMR Launch—25th January 2017
- PTC Faculty Retreat
- Leadership and Management Training, Pohnpei
- Leadership and Management Workshop, Methodist Church in Fiji
- Ecumenical Relations Project Book Launch



Staff movements:

- Rima Sivanjali will be promoted from being finance officer to being Finance and Administration manager for the IMR! Congratulations Rima for the big step.
- Rusila Nabouniu has been assigned as communications and pastoral counseling project officer as of 2017.
- IRSA welcomes the volunteer services of Helene Weinbrenner since October, thank you for the hard work and dedication!
- Ana-Latu Dickson is on home leave in her Milne Bay Province home, PNG until early February 2017. Wishing Ana many blessings with family and friends.



WISHING EVERYONE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

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