

The Institute for Mission and Research
**Report to the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) 11th General
Assembly**

Auckland, October 29th, 2018

Introduction

Moderator, Deputy Moderator, General Secretary
Presidents, Moderators, Archbishops and Bishops
Elders and Traditional Custodians of this land
Delegates and representatives of the churches here present
Women and youth leaders and representatives
Overseas partners' representatives!

Greetings in the presence of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit!

I acknowledge with deep respect the traditional custodians of the land on which I stand, their spirituality that gives meaning and purpose, and the presence of their ancestral spirit. May the words and thoughts that will be spoken and the thoughts that will be shared in this report find harmony in your vision of how life ought to be lived and experienced on your land.

At the outset, we would like to deeply acknowledge with respect the memory, life and work of the late Rev. Rosalyn Nokise, the former Director of the God's Pacific People (GPP) programme. She passed on to be with God in August 2016. Her deep sense of commitment to God's mission in the Pacific and to the wellbeing of the churches and their members, especially the 'little ones', was truly inspirational and is the reason for doing what Institute does today. We also acknowledge with deep gratitude the immense contribution of Professor Manfred Ernst, the former Director of the Institute for Research and Social Analysis (IRSA) who has now retired back home in Germany in July 2016. His dedicated work in research and training, as with the late Rev. Rosalyn Nokise, provided a firm foundation and direction to the development of the Institute today. To these two inspirational leaders, we owe them much gratitude. We shall remember them with affection and fond memories.

This report highlights and summarises major developments since the PCC 10th General Assembly in 2013 in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

1. New Beginnings for GPP and IRSA

1.1 The integration of the God's Pacific People (GPP) and the Institute for Research Social Analysis (IRSA) to the Institute for Mission and Research (IMR) was the mandate of the PCC 2016 August Executive Committee. The new name – Institute for Mission and Research – was endorsed by the respective Executive Committees of PCC and PTC in November 2016. The Institute was launched in January 2017 by Rev. Professor Dr. Feleterika Nokise and Rev. Francois Pihaatae.

2. Capacity Building for Mission

2.1 Since the first training in 2001 on 'business and finance management', the professional development training for member churches has evolved to accredited certificate courses. These are on leadership and management; social analysis; peacebuilding; and pastoral counselling.

2.2 The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu has pioneered the accredited certificate course on 'leadership and management' for its schools' teachers in 2015. This year's certificate course is the 4th cohort. Goldie College of the United Church Solomon Islands has done the same with its schools' teachers in June/July this year. The Anglican Church of Melanesia, the United Church Papua New Guinea, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, the Kiribati Uniting Church, the Tonga National Council of Churches and the Papua New Guinea Council of Churches, have in the past three years hosted professional development training on pastoral counselling, social analysis, leadership and management, and peacebuilding. Because of the increasing interests in the PTC courses mentioned, the churches in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will be discussing ecumenical partnerships on course coordination, registration and management and delivery at a symposium later this year. If this leads to partnership agreements, it would be a fine example of ecumenical cooperation on education in among these churches.

2.3 To date, over 2,500 students, priests, ministers, pastors and lay workers in the churches, and civil society organisations have gone through the courses (either for professional development or the accredited certificate courses, the personnel exchange programme and the English course. The mission programme envisioned and mandated by the Maohi Nui General Assembly in 1997 and reaffirmed by the Cook Islands General Assembly in 2002 is today providing the services that the church elders envisioned back in 1997 and 2002. To these visionaries and pioneers, some of whom have passed on, much is owed to them. Not only did they envisioned such a programme, they resolved to take on the financial responsibility for it as mandated in the Cook Islands Assembly in 2002. Until now and since the first training in 2001 on 'business and finance management' the overseas partners shouldered 97% of the financial cost for the administration, management and delivery of the courses. This Assembly is in a historic position to honour the pledge of the church elders in 2002 of financial support to the mission and research work of the Institute. A recommendation (see *annex 1* on the details) on this for this Assembly's consideration.

2.4 An important implication of the increase in requests from the churches in Melanesia, is the recognition and acceptance of the merits associated with PTC's education profile: a regional provider of quality contextual theology and missiological education with practical applications. It is a strengthening and an encouraging outcome of the ecumenical association between the churches and the College. The impact of the work to date sees interests from governments and development partners to discuss partnership possibilities with the churches in Vanuatu and PNG. Vanuatu's Ministry of Education's proposed new policy direction with the support of Australian Aid to make the leadership and management certificate a standard course for all school teachers is an indication. The Australian government's church partnership programme's financial support of the PNG Council of Churches' leadership and management training early this year is another. These seem to imply that PTC's profile as a quality education provider with a unique approach to education, has significant contribution to the development of Pacific societies. Exploring the possibility of a symposium on 'Pacific education uniqueness' for its member churches is worth considering by this assembly.

2.5 Over the past five years, the Institute has facilitated church to church attachments (either for experiential learning or on technical expertise) of about 30 church personnel. These were requests from the churches in West Papua, Tuvalu, Pohnpei, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga. The attachments were on communications, human rights, library services, curriculum review, violence against women, agriculture, finance management, church structural reform, counselling relating to climate change impacts, and political advocacy on West Papua. This is simply to say that ecumenical cooperation among the churches, through personnel exchange, continues to happen even if such collaboration at the leadership and policy levels faltered over the

past five years. If there is to be significant investments in ecumenical cooperation among the churches, this is one area that the attached proposal in *annex 1* for financial support has justifiable merits and realistic potential to deepen ecumenical relations among the churches in the region.

2.6 Since 2014, with the exception of 2017, there were about 20 students sent by the churches in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia), Kanaky (New Caledonia) and West Papua to attend the three months English language course. Understanding and having the ability to speak a commonly used language in ecumenical relations helps with building ecumenical solidarity and understanding. It enhances regional and international advocacy, diplomacy and negotiation on self-determination. From 2020, the English language course will be conducted for eight months. It will include two weeks of professional development training in social analysis to assist with their churches' advocacy work.

3. Research and Publications

3.1 The major research project *Navigating Trouble Waters: Ecumenism in the Pacific Islands Since the 1980s*, was completed in June 2017, after 4 years of work. The book was launched in July at PTC by Rev. Dr. Tevita Banivanua, the former President of the Methodist Church in Fiji. Since then, the outcomes of the research were presented at the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM) in August 2017, the PCLM strategic planning meeting in early October 2017, and at the PNG church leaders' second consultation in Goroka, PNG, in late October 2017. This is a valuable resource for national and regional initiatives on ecumenical renewal and for the reconfiguration of the churches' regional ecumenical structure. To write the new chapter of the Pacific's ecumenical story, it is important to examine the opinions and ideas of those interviewed which are documented in the book. The research findings and recommendations for each of the countries that participated, and for the region could be the basis for envisioning what ecumenism could and ought to be for the Pacific. A recommendation in this regard is presented before this Assembly's consideration.

3.2 The research project *Re-weaving the Ecological Mat* started in April 2017 in partnership with the PCC secretariat. It is on ecology, understood as an inclusive household of human beings and the environment, and the relationship within and between them. The gist of the research project is to map the resources – physical, religious and cultural – through the use of stories. It is aimed at strengthening resilience and our people's sense of security in these times of rapid social change. Security of identity and confidence in the liberating power of their resources are important for the development of their own indicators to monitor the progress of their wellbeing and development. Bilateral meetings were held with churches in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu in 2017 which led to a conference that held in November last year. Follow-ups were conducted earlier this month (October) and will continue in late November. The research process includes discussion workshops, individual interviews, and publications. The project will conclude in 2020.

3.3 Quality, relevant and up-to-date information is essential for the vitality, efficacy and agency of the churches' mission work. The establishment of a research institute in the 1970s by the Pacific churches and hosted in Vanuatu was to service the information needs of the churches. Unfortunately, and due to the lack of resources and churches' commitment, it faded with the sunset. Nevertheless, the above two research projects are conducted in close partnership with PCC, the churches, some government agencies and individuals. But such centralised research activities may not necessarily inspire the churches to have the findings seriously discussed internally and to inform policy decisions. What is needed is a network model of church related research institutes so that the churches have a direct input to the development of the research and, hence, more likely to action the outcomes. The establishment of a regional research network on mission is, therefore, recommended.

4 Finances

4.1 The overseas partners have generously supported the work of the Institute over many years. While some others have pulled out due to revised funding priorities, committed partners namely, Bread for the World (BfdW), Missio Aachen, Association for Protestant Missions and Churches in Germany or EMW for short, KAIROS Canada, the Methodist Church in Great Britain, and Mission OneWorld remain. In total these partners have contributed over 3.8 million dollars in grants and an annual volunteer, and invested technical expertise in PTC and IMR since 2014.

4.2 But as generous as the partners are and as grateful as we are, such partnerships are more than the provision of funding, important as these are to the mission work of the churches and the ecumenical movement. There are genuine mission interests and valid concerns among the partners, as we do, on the regressive development of our people, made more belligerent by the impacts of the ecological crisis. But these mission concerns are primarily the churches' task to finance. It is for this reason and in the interest of advancing 'ecumenical partnerships in mission' that the recommendation of a 30,000 Fiji dollars annual grant towards the Institute's work is proposed.

5 Recommendations

5.1 That the 11th PCC General Assembly of 2018 endorses an annual grant of 30,000 Fiji dollars towards the ecumenical and mission work of the Institute for Mission and Research (IMR) from its General Assembly Funds, beginning with the 2019 financial year (see the details in *annex 1*).

5.2 That the 11th PCC General Assembly of 2018 endorses a series of national and regional workshop discussions by the churches on the recommendations contained in the book *Navigating Trouble Waters: Ecumenism in the Pacific since the 1980s* to be implemented by PCC and PTC.

5.3 That the 11th PCC General Assembly of 2018 endorses a 'regional research network on mission' of church related research institutions to be coordinated by PCC and PTC.

Conclusion

Changing the story of our region's regressive development through capacity building and research is a key mission task for the churches. Two fundamental resources - the Judeo-Christian tradition, and indigenous knowledge and traditions - are at the churches' disposal to elucidate this 'changing of our region's development story'. The churches' various connections to secular knowledge and competencies, and political leadership and policy makers is another resource. This unique position is essential to the mission task of changing the Pacific story of regressive development. How will the churches, strategically and ecumenically, exploit these advantages to further their mission work?

May I, on behalf of the Institute's staff and families, convey our warmest greetings and prayers for God's creative and discerning Spirit to be upon this respected ecumenical meeting of our regional ecumenical family.

Mr. Aisake Casimira – Director

Annex 1: Proposal on Investing in Churches' Capacity Building and Research Work

Summary

From the beginning of the 1990s, Pacific churches, together with their tri-partite ecumenical organisations (PCC, PTC, SPATS) and overseas partners as well as other church related organisations and interested parties, took up the challenge posed by an awareness that the ecumenical arm of its 'mission' work in relation to its overall life and work and its impact on the lives of the people, was in dire need of a new paradigm shift. The leaders are to be applauded for their wisdom and visionary outlook in recognizing that such a change would inevitably require some degree of reconfiguration of existing precepts and perceptions as well as the possibility of introducing new ones. A spirit of determination spurred the churches. Meetings and consultations were held over a number of years in an attempt to find a new framework that can encapsulate the new vision and bring into fruition the aspired outcome. It started in Kiribati with a meeting of potential partners in 1991. Further meetings were held in Fiji in 1992, 1995 and 1996 culminating in a decision taken at the PCC General Assembly in Maohi Nui in 1997 to launch the God's Pacific People (GPP) programme.

During its inaugural conference held in Fiji, June 1999, a clear mandate and a plan of action for the new mission programme were formulated and passed by the then church leaders who met under the auspices of the PCC. Thirty participants from over twenty denominations and church related organizations shared their wisdom and experience as they explored strategies that would address the needs of the churches to develop their capacities for mission and enhance the merits of co-operation in the mission field. This need for ecumenical partnership in mission was further clarified through the establishment of a statement of purpose and the formulation of the GPP mandate with basic goals for the initial phase of the programme. At the PCC General Assembly in the Cook Islands in 2002, PCC's ownership of GPP was strongly reaffirmed as well as the mandate for PTC to manage, administer and provide it with a governance structure. In addition, the Cook Islands Assembly strongly endorsed the recommendation from *Group F1 on Promotion of Ecumenism in the Pacific* for the PCC member churches to contribute 100 Fiji dollars for every participant enrolled in courses offered by GPP. In other words, there was, from the outset, a clear understanding that participation involves the acceptance of financial responsibility.

The Institute for Mission and Research (IMR) was launched in January 2017 by the PTC Principal and the General Secretary of PCC. The Institute is the result of the merger of the GPP and IRSA programmes. IMR addresses two constitutional objectives of PTC – training in mission, and research: (f) to assist in providing for the Pacific Churches' leaders, ministers and laity ecumenical, and inclusive training for ministry that integrates academic theology, sociology, and missiology, and that is relevant for ministry in the diverse contexts of the Pacific; and, (g) to provide research that is relevant for the contexts of the Pacific.

These objectives, by implication, are not only descriptive of the Institute's core work, but also target the ecumenical membership of both PCC and PTC. In that respect, the proposed provision of financial support for the Institute from the General Assembly is in line with the spirit of ecumenical co-operation amongst the churches for developmental work that would enhance the mission of the churches within its particular locale/context or that of the region as a whole. Since 2001 with the initial training on 'business and finance management', the Institute, over the years, has developed and conducted accredited certificate courses. These are leadership and management, peacebuilding, social analysis and pastoral counselling. Professional development courses were also conducted, as

well as mission exchanges and the English language course. To date and over a 17 years period since the first training in 2001, over 2,500 students, ministers, pastors, priests and church workers, and civil society personnel have gone through the former GPP and IRSA programmes either as participants in the professional development training courses, in the accredited certificate courses or in the personnel exchange programme and the English course. Research is also a core focus of the Institute. Since the publication ‘Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands’ in 1994, there were other researches published in the intervening years. The latest was ‘Navigating Troubled Waters: The Ecumenical Movement in the Pacific Islands Since the 1980s’, published in 2017. These services to the churches – training in mission and research – have proven to be of great value, not only to the churches but to secular learning institutions and civil society organisations.

The establishment of the Institute, both owned by PCC and PTC, is a real breakthrough in ecumenical and programmatic relations between these two regional ecumenical organisations (REOs). This augurs well for the emerging ‘new story’ and the proposed structure for a centralised ecumenical governing body that is currently being entertained by the Pacific Church Leaders Meeting (PCLM). The Institute is also a great opportunity for the churches to develop and, hence invest in, with regards to its potential to deliver quality mission training in capacity building, and in the provision of quality research and publications. It also has the potential, if capitalised on by both PCC and PTC, to complement (yet with a unique Christian focus) secular research and capacity building trainings that are offered by secular tertiary Institutions in the region such as USP. It is for these reasons and in envisioning the future of the Institute that the recommendation of 30,000 Fiji dollars per year as PCC’s contribution from its General Assembly funds towards the work of the Institute is made.
