

BushFire

Presbyterian Women
Aotearoa NZ
June 2020



Kia ora! Greetings

“They do not fear bad news, they *confidently trust* the Lord to care for them” (Psalm 112:7 NLT) – Amen! Surely we did confidently trust the Lord in one’s own unique way in the past 2-3 months until our safe arrival at level 1 now. Congratulations for being women of faith and keeping us all in chains of prayers and thoughts.

The executive meets by Zoom and we will keep you up to date as our plans at this stage of the year are still in a process of change. More later....

I am pleased to have included in this panui some **articles** for you to read and share with your women’s group.

Firstly, spiritual mother/Faletua Lydia Nokise, once stated to me *“It might be good to do something timely, given what’s happening in the world today”* when I approached her to write something about her faith journey during lockdown. Her very own story; **‘Responding as mothers to racism’**

Secondly, **‘Grateful for your help on this journey’**; a poem from my sister in Christ, Tupaisiva Tamari Mulitalo-Cheung (American Samoa). So it’s time to sit by the fire, feed the firewoods, wrap a blanket, switch off your twitter, open your Bible beside you, remember a box of tissues, enjoy your panui reading!....

Faaolataga-Ola Leasi



(Ready for powhiri at Ohope Marae)

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‘RESPONDING AS MOTHERS TO RACISM’

Lydia Johnson-Nokise

I find myself in a very strange place these days. I am an American, a female pastor and theological educator who has spent most of my adult life in cross-cultural theological education, in places as diverse as Jamaica, South Africa, Fiji and New Zealand. After supposedly retiring, I returned from New Zealand to my native United States in 2008; however (because God is full of surprises!), I returned to New Zealand last year and became the wife of Rev. Dr. Fele Nokise, minister of Newtown PIPC.

Not only is my own personal journey – living ‘betwixt and between’ diverse cultures – strange, but the times we are now living in are strange in the extreme. The global pandemic introduced new realities that in many ways seem to negate what it means to be fully human – ‘social distancing,’ ‘lockdown,’ ‘quarantine.’ The worldwide suffering caused by the pandemic has, in turn, unleashed widespread economic upheaval. And in the midst of this turning-upside-down of life as we have known it, the sin of racism recently reached a tipping point in the United States. The latest incident in a long history of police brutality against African Americans has unleashed wave after wave of protest and unrest, not seen since the days I came of age during the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. African Americans, and their allies, have had enough, and their struggle has now spilled over to other countries around the world, whose citizens are being pushed to revisit their own racism. How do we respond as Christian women to this crisis in our New Zealand context?

During the nearly nine minutes that George Floyd lay on a Minneapolis street gasping for breath, dying from a policeman’s knee on his neck, he not only repeatedly gasped ‘I can’t breathe!’ He also, as he neared death, called out ‘Mama!’ He called for his mother. Whether or not we women are biological mothers, we are, in a sense, all mothers for those who are crying out from every kind of mistreatment and disrespect. How can we be mothers in the face of the racism in our own society?

I am immersed now in Pacific Islander communities within the PCANZ, and our Pacific Islander ministers, spouses and session clerks in the Wellington region have just begun an intentional dialogue about the Pacific Islander experience of racism – in New Zealand, and specifically in the PCANZ. This is a fruitful, if potentially painful, dialogue, as we search for Christ-like responses to the reality of racism in our midst. What do we have to offer as women to this quest for wholeness?

In a recent Newtown PIPC online service, where I have been leading the weekly ‘Children’s Time’ during our online worship while in lockdown, I showed pictures of mother hens sheltering their chicks under their wings, just as Jesus described himself as being like a mother hen in Matthew 23:39, when he wept over the state of Jerusalem: “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her young under her wings.” I pointed out to the children that God too is compared to a mother bird several times in scripture, as in Isaiah 31, which says, “Like a bird hovering over its young, so the Lord will

protect and rescue Jerusalem.” And Psalm 36 says, “How precious is your steadfast love, o God. All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”

As women, as mothers, we seek to protect, to ‘gather people in’. In this mothering care, we cannot discriminate, caring for some while pushing others aside. It is in our motherly DNA to welcome and care for all. As George Webb lay dying at the hands of an uncaring police officer and called for his mother, I hope that I

But, as more and more American women have said in recent days, “We are all George’s mama.” That is our calling as well, in our own context here in New Zealand. We must honestly ask where and how the scourge of racism continues to rear its ugly head in our own communities, and even in our church. And then we must respond with acts of caring, protecting, welcoming and loving the most vulnerable by sheltering them under our wings with Christ’s love in our hearts.



Lydia Nokise & Ola
(at Newtown PIC Women’s Fellowship event)

Grateful for your help on this journey



By Tupaisiva Tamari Mulitalo-Cheung - Deacon/Member of the Word of Life Church in Pago Pago, American Samoa. Currently Researcher and Translator at Samoan Studies Institute, American Samoa Community College. Writes short stories and poetry bilingually - depending on the language the inspiration comes from. Writes to share hope in Christ, “*in whom we move and have our being.*”

Some seasons of our journeys
we are destined to meet
and walk besides people
we grow to love
Whether from the same womb
or a bond so deep
when you continue on your
personal routes -
they take a part of you
their love becomes your strength

Some of the times in our journeys
we are fated to meet
and fight with people
before we see they were
for us to grow and excel
and when it’s time to move
their gifts live on in you
to impact others

Sometimes in our journeys
God allows both friend and foe

to be the platform you spring from
into being the unique person
He planned you to be
and when you take your own road
their strengths rub off on you
I do no credit in describing
their impact on my soul
except to encourage:
Dearly beloved
let’s keep the faith
till we meet again
in heaven -our final destination.

So here’s a little tribute for you
Thank you for your help on this journey
I couldn’t have done it with you

Proverbs 27:17 New International Version (NIV)

***As iron sharpens iron,
so one person sharpens another***

Presbyterian Women has been active in the ecumenical group Faith in Beijing+25. A key concern has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls. The ACT alliance has produced [A Briefing paper](#) which provides key messages and recommendations for policy makers and private sector actors among others.

Rebuilding a Just World: Faith Actors Call for COVID-19 Responses to Tackle Gender Inequalities 22 April 2020

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many faith actors are on the frontline. PWANZ is standing together with religious leaders and faith-based actors around the world to advocate to governments and civil society, for urgent responses that protect women's rights and achieve gender equality.

The crisis does not operate in a vacuum and, as a result, the pandemic is increasing pre-existing gender inequalities. Around the world, gender roles have a marked impact on exposure, transmission, and outcome patterns of COVID-19. Women and girls are experiencing intersecting injustices in political, social and economic spheres.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

In the statement published today, Faith in Beijing, who are a collective of religious actors and faith-based networks, call for COVID-19 responses to include strategies to address and prevent Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Under lockdown policies, many women are forced to stay at homes where they are not safe or secure. They are forced to live with abusive partners or parents, while services to survivors of gender-based violence are harder to access. In some communities around the world, violence against women during the pandemic has been perpetrated by the security agencies enforcing the lockdown, using undue force.

Faith on the Frontline

Faith communities have a strong base from which to promote social distancing (to reduce transmission of the virus causing COVID-19), while also practicing solidarity. Many religious actors hold significant power and trust, sometimes more than the government. Thus, religious institutions can play a vital role in distributing accurate key public health information to their communities. Religious leaders can play a positive role in promoting messages of gender justice, challenging stigma and harmful gender norms.

Equality and Justice for All

As business as usual is paused, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the brokenness in our world and our economic system. In these spaces, we can begin to imagine a world rooted in equality and justice for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how globally interconnected we are and how gender injustice reveals itself at an individual and a collective level.

PWANZ, along with Faith in Beijing members, were due to participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women 64. While the international gathering of UN Member States and civil society was postponed last month, our work for gender justice remains important, to ensure a just and sustainable future for all.

NOTES:

Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organisations who have signed the statements include (in alphabetical order):

1. ACT Alliance
2. Act Church of Sweden
3. Anglican Communion
4. Association of Presbyterian Women Aotearoa New Zealand
5. Christian Aid
6. DanChurchAid
7. The Girls' Brigade International
8. Islamic Relief Worldwide
9. Side by Side: Faith movement for gender justice
10. United Society of Partners in the Gospel
11. We Will Speak Out South Africa
12. World Council of Churches

BRIEFING PAPER

Gender and Faith perspectives on COVID-19

We are all working together

PWANZ works with CWS

CWS is the development, justice and aid agency of our church

CWS is a member of the ACT Alliance

actalliance

A coalition more than 135 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people.

Excerpts from [A Briefing paper](#) with its easy to read perspective.

COVID-19 significantly impacts women and girls. This scenario is even more acute when we intersect gender with other social markers such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and geographical location. The outbreak of COVID-19 has progressed from a discrete outbreak in one Chinese city, to clusters of cases in many countries, through to a pandemic with most countries reporting cases.

Our faith perspective motivates us to ensure justice for all, not only during a pandemic/crisis, but constantly through-out our work. Faith is a source of hope in moments of despair and crisis. Guided by the values of love, compassion and solidarity, faith communities and actors endeavour to provide accompaniment and journeying with those who suffer. We will safeguard the participation and voice of the communities and different groups, including LGBTI, during this response and will particularly focus on the needs and rights of women and girls.

This tiny, invisible virus demonstrates that our actions are interconnected, and a virus somewhere is a virus everywhere. Only coordinated action in the name of public interest in the most personal sphere of life that health constitutes is a way to rebuild and reimagine a better world after this virus.

Domestic violence cases have risen dramatically as people across most countries have been quarantined, often with their abusers.

According to some estimates, around the world, women make up almost 70 percent of healthcare workers, and most of them occupy nursing roles — putting them on the front lines of efforts to combat and contain outbreaks of disease.

The outbreak has already impacted and disrupted women's and girls' education as most universities and schools are now being temporarily closed. Where home-schooling or distance schooling is a possibility often women perform this along-side and in addition to their salaried work duties, thereby increasing their work burden, becoming part-time unpaid teachers as such work is less likely to be taken up by men even in a dual salaried



Photo Credits: Cover Photo— Ayush Joshi, Christian Aid

Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa NZ Delegation to the United Nations

Sadly, CSW64 (the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women) did not take place this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course we are hoping that the world might be back on a more even keel by next year, but at this stage no-one knows if CSW is likely to take place in March 2021.

This is usually the time of year when we are asking you to think about if you might be interested in attending CSW, but at this stage it might be more certain for 2022 onwards. However if you did want to be considered for any potential March 2021 delegation then make contact with PWANZ United Nations Convenor:

Mavis Duncanson : mavisj.duncanson@gmail.com

Stressful times

Covid-19 lockdown has resulted in extra stresses to many of us. We were aware that for women and children who were already at risk of violence this risk of harm would have increased during the lockdown levels and will be heightened by any loss of income to the family. When you need help for yourself or are concerned about family and friends being subject to violence the following agencies are available anytime.

Safe to Talk 24/7. Confidential. Free,
Korero mai ka ora
Sexual Harm Helpline

08000 44334
Text 4334
<https://safetotalk.nz>
email support@safetotalk.nz



<https://womensrefuge.org.nz>

Call our free Crisisline on 0800 REFUGE or 0800 733 843 **anytime**,

ORANGA TAMARIKI 0508 326 459
or email contact@ot.govt.nz
<https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/>

