



The “Bula Bulletin”



February 2011

*Jesus' time of solitude
and prayer:*

Matthew 4: 1-11

Mark 14: 32-42

Retreat: Definition – “The act or process of withdrawing”

Do you intend to devote a specific amount of time away from your ordinary routine this year to further develop your relationship with God? Many of us may seek rest and reconnection with God over the coming months through prayer, fasting, reading and worship, though I suspect, few of us will be given the opportunity to do this through our work places.

Staff retreats: In Fiji week-long residential staff retreats are common in the month of January, as organisations go away from the usual office environment to map out their work for the coming year. All staff attend and contribute to this planning process.

I have just returned from such a retreat with 21 other staff members of the Pacific Conference of Churches. While being primarily a work-focussed retreat, our work and faith journeys over the five days were very much intertwined.

We stayed at the Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development in Nadave, 50-minutes drive to the north west of Suva. The Centre, set in relaxing natural surroundings, was established by the Hanns Sedal Foundation of Germany and opened in 1982. Today it has a dual function; it's a venue that serves the training needs of local organisations, and it's also an educational centre for young men attending term-long vocational courses. For our stay, we were housed in 6 chalet-style bures (pronounced *bour-rays* or traditional Fijian houses), that overlooked the tranquil, meandering Rewa river below. Admittedly a wonderful location for a reflective retreat... but please do also *think* mosquitoes!

Re-thinking Oceania*: We had to do a lot of thinking ourselves... Our retreat programme focused on the year ahead, and especially on how we are to incorporate the PCC concept paper ‘*Re-thinking Oceania*’ into all our work programmes. The Re-thinking Oceania document, published last year by PCC, emphasises the need to accompany member Churches here in the Pacific as we are all called to live “counter community”. We were asked to consider what the term “counter community” meant, and whether our own lifestyles were counter community? Does it mean sticking out from the crowd or sticking up for the crowd? Our actions and interactions should already be characterised by the love and compassion of God, so we were invited to reflect on what extra is being asked of us in this document, in our work and in our lives?

* **Oceania or Pacific?** The Pacific was so named by explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. At the time of his ‘discovery’, the vast ocean appeared calm and peaceful, so he christened it Pacific, from the Latin word ‘*Pacifica*’ meaning peaceful. Oceania, on the other hand, sounds grand and romantic, and according to Epeli Hau’ofa, in his pioneering 1993 work ‘*Our Sea of Islands*’, depicts a sea of islands *and* their inhabitants. Oceania is the name often used and preferred by the people of Oceania.





The PCC logo:

A traditional outrigger canoe, powered either by the wind or by hand.

A vessel that values traditional knowledge, respects the environment and sustains communities.

By seeking justice and peace for all the people of Oceania, the Re-thinking Oceania paper invites us to critique the values of this world and to question the influence that global trends have upon this region and its people. This is a pioneering approach here in the Pacific. Perhaps you have already questioned the same where you live? All Christians are called to give hope to those who are suffering and who are voiceless and vulnerable. To do this in Oceania, we must be mindful of the central pillars supporting the Re-thinking Oceania concept: The need for:

- good governance,
- peace and security,
- cultural and social cohesion, and for
- fair and sustainable development.

Devotions: To precede our daily labours, at the start of each day we had hour-long Devotions, together with unaccompanied singing and accompanied Bible studies. To follow our week-long journey, you may wish to look up the Bible passages Rev. Francois Pihaatae chose for our reflections:

Luke 10: 30-35 The Good Samaritan. Which character best describes you in the parable and which character would Jesus say you are? We had several donkeys!!

Mark 1: 16-20 Jesus chooses four fishermen. Why did Jesus choose Simon and Andrew, and separately James and John? What did each bring to discipleship?

Nehemiah, Chapters 1-7 Identify Nehemiah's vision and consider how it could strengthen the work of PCC.

Luke 24: 13-35 The road to Emmaus. What message(s) can be drawn out to help PCC accompany its member Churches and the people of God in Oceania?

These are exciting and challenging times for the Pacific Conference of Churches, as we seek to gain Re-thinking Oceania acceptance and to act on our convictions. The retreat made us realise that we are all in the same boat together. **Let's pray** that we can each make it a more comfortable journey for our fellow passengers.

God bless
Julia

The PCC 'Crew' 2011: Reaction to the leaked news of my work-permit approval...!!

