

# LAUNCH OUT LETTERS (LOL)

Newsletter and Journal of Te Hao Nui– Launch Out Formation Programme  
Archdiocese of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

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Welcome to the August issue of LOL.

In the recent retreat Fr Alan Roberts gave to Launch Out, he asked us “How hungry are we for God?” The image of bread in the Gospel represents God’s provision for all our needs---from our basic need for food, to our deepest hunger for God.

This month’s issue is replete with topics that celebrate the many ways God feeds the Church. In the Gospel reflection, **Jackie Jansen**, a Launch Out Graduate and former prison chaplain shares the offering of Jesus, of the bread that feeds our physical bodies, and as the bread of life that feeds our souls. In a similar vein, **Vicky Raw’s** pastoral journey in growing a discipleship programme for her parish, underpins the many ways God calls on people to provide for peoples, as Jesus did with the boy with five loaves and two fish (Jn 6: 1-14). The same thing can be said for Lay Pastoral Leaders (LPL) with **Mary Ann Greaney’s** study that she conducted in 2011 to evaluate the impact of having LPLs in parishes. The findings are worth revisiting as we consider effective models of being Church. Similarly, **Bridget Taumoepeau** writes from Tonga and offers a perspective on how another Pacific Island celebrates their faith, and with their own way of empowering the laity. The gift of Bridget’s article is helping us see that wherever we are, God works through people for people. **Neil Vaney, sm** writes an interesting book review on the Intelligent Trap. The wisdom of his piece brings us back to Jesus’ self-giving as living bread. We are blessed to be instruments of God’s providence to people, but we are not the creators of the ‘bread’ which we partake and share through our ministries. Our leadership expertise and theological knowledge do not make us impervious to incompetence and corruption. We are essentially as hungry and as wounded as the throng we are called to serve.

The most glaring reflection of the Church’s woundedness is the abuse in care by our institutions as evidenced by The Royal Commission Report. We need to lament and atone for the sins of our hungry and broken Church. Our lamentation calls us to recognise and own our hunger for power and wealth, which led us to the abuse; and may still be keeping us from the conversion we need. Jesus recognises that while we are in this world, we are not of this world (Jn 17:15-18). The duality of our nature renders us vulnerable to worldliness, in such a way that we succumb to the hunger that only our senses can comprehend. Beneath the layers of our worldly famishment our greatest hunger should be for God – *to consume and be consumed by God*, putting aside unhealthy worldly aspirations.

May we be graced with the awareness of our true hunger for God; and may that hunger transform us and make us worthy servants of God’s people.

*Maya Bernardo, Launch Out Formator and Manager*



*When he had finished eating, he said to Simon,  
“Launch out into the deep water and let down your  
nets for a catch”.*

*Luke 5: 4*

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www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation  
-programme/](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/launch-out-formation-programme/)

# The bread of life

John 6:41-51, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Jackie Jansen  
Launch Out Graduate

*"I am the bread of life that came down from heaven."*

This statement started a 'murmur' among the Jews, who found it difficult to accept as some of them knew his family. Jesus was quick to stop them. He followed up with further statements that reinforced the nature of his close relationship with the Father. He states he is the "Bread of life" ... that comes down from heaven.

... the living bread... from heaven...whoever eats this bread will live forever...the bread I will give is my flesh...for the life of the world...

Jesus' describes himself as "living bread" from heaven and promising eternal life shocked many of his listeners especially those who had been brought up in the traditions of the law and the prophets from the time of Moses. It is important to understand this context to realise the resistance that Jesus faced.



Cereal and three buns by Wesual Click. Published October 31, 2017. Copied from Unsplash <https://unsplash.com/photos/cereal-and-three-buns-rsWZ-P9FbQ4>

Jesus was attracting a growing attention, as a teacher, preacher, and leader – a miracle worker. He also attracted opposition particularly that of the religious authorities who found Jesus' teaching radical and find his growing popularity as a political threat to the throne (as some would want to make him king). The rising tension was palpable. So, when Jesus declared that He was the Son of God and that the bread he offers is 'his flesh,' they had enough evidence to prosecute Jesus as a criminal under Jewish law.

The idea of 'bread of life' is an echo from the Old Testament's 'manna' the Jewish people received during the exodus. In the First Reading, Ezekiel is shown tired and dispirited, ready to give up. An angel twice wakes him up with a cake and water to enable him to continue his mission (this passage underpins the Lord's care). Bread being a staple food is valued – especially if it might seem always available gratis. When Jesus describes himself as the "living bread from heaven" promising life for eternity it must be particularly special. Moreover "the bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world" – this is something really special!

The ultimate promise in His teaching was the institution of the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:26) ...take and eat; this is my body... poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (the Mass) is enshrined in the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. To reaffirm His relationship with the Father, Jesus affirms that He is the way to the Father- 'no one can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws them.'

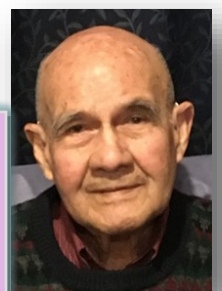
...I will raise them up on the last day...they shall be taught by God...everyone who listens to my Father and learns from Him, comes to me...whoever believes in me has eternal life...I am the living bread that comes down from heaven...whoever eats this bread will live forever...the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.

These statements are bold and carry a powerful message of total commitment in love for those who believe. The link with the second reading (Eph: 4:30-5:2) is 'not to do anything to grieve the Spirit of God'—which admonishes us to get rid of our negative attributes; be imitators of God; and love in Christ as He loved us...

God's love brought salvation to all who believe in His son Jesus Christ. We commemorate His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, whenever we celebrate Mass. Our thanksgiving is to love and serve God with Christ-like commitment by serving our brothers and sisters. The responsorial psalm (psalm 34) puts together the essence of the sacred meal that we partake – 'to taste and see the goodness of the Lord'. Proclaiming this psalm gives us the opportunity to express our faith, with joy, hope and gusto!

*"I will bless the Lord at all times.  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad"*

Jackie is a Launch Out Graduate following an extensive career in education and counselling. He was the Catholic Chaplain at Arohata Women's Prison for over a decade, supported by his late wife Amy who volunteered as Assistant Chaplain. He is a father of five daughters, grandad to fourteen and great-grandad to eight. He remains an active parishioner across Te Awakairangi, Te Wairua Tapu and ADW communities.



# Feed my lambs

*My pastoral project reflection*

By Vicky Raw  
Launch Out Candidate  
Te Whetu o Te Moana (Star of the Sea),  
Marlborough



<https://www.facebook.com/staroftheseamarlb>



<https://flitterfever.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Star-of-the-Sea-Marlborough-Catholic-Parish.jpg>

*'Feed my lambs, look after my sheep, feed my sheep' (John 21:16-17)*

Food is an essential part of our daily lives. It provides the nutrients that we need. It brings people together to share in friendship, to converse and to just spend time in each other's presence. Sometimes we don't realise that we are hungry or that maybe we have not been eating the right sort of food.

My 2023 pastoral project arose from our Discipleship Group's, desire to establish a faith formation programme at Star of the Sea Parish – Marlborough. As a new group within the leadership framework of the parish this was a blank canvas to paint on.

Although I started the ball rolling, growing the programme was a team-effort with fellow Discipleship Group members Simon Popham and Paddy Dowling. The passion, support, and enthusiasm we shared made the journey personally life-giving. From the outset our parish priest, at the time, was involved in the initial ideation, almost 9 months prior to the project coming to fruition. This time of discovery, conversations, SWOT analyses and discernment were essential for identifying the right programme.

Recreating the wheel and making more work for ourselves was not what anybody wanted to do. With so many rich resources available online we were spoilt for choice. The immediate choice of readily available material was [Alpha](#), the interdenominational 11-week programme that has been running for over 30 years, based in the UK and hosted by Rev. Nicky Gumble; and [Catholicism](#) created by Word on Fire and hosted by Bishop Robert Barron. But a somewhat newer programme, and little known in NZ, was [Sycamore](#). This is a series of twenty different videos on the fundamentals of the Christian faith through a Catholic lens, written and presented by Fr. Stephen Wang.

Similar to Alpha, Sycamore creates the opportunity for small group discussions, with set questions to help start conversations; the website has a rich set of resources to guide leaders on how to run an evening (almost down to the minute); the ability to select different 'pathways' depending on the liturgical time of the year (Advent, Lent, after Easter) or needs of the group (RCIA, school formation or parish programmes) and thus each uses a combination of different videos; and finally it is free to download, it can be used anywhere and there is no need to buy additional books.

*Continues on Page 4*

We decided that Lent 2023 would be our first foray into using Sycamore. What seemed like a good plan, what we had researched and prayed for seemed lost for a time for me. To say that I was nervous before starting was an understatement – what if nobody turned up? What if nobody liked the material? What if there were tricky questions or moments? What if .... my mind went into turmoil the afternoon of our first 'Taster Session.'



*God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6)*

An opportunity for prayer and reflection on the story of Zaccheus in the sycamore tree was granted to me and Simon before anyone turned up. The peace and reassurance that came from this time will always be something that stays with me. It was from God, and it was God.

People rolled in through the doors and continued to come each week of Lent. Over tea, coffee and biscuits people chatted and were able to catch up on the week. As we unpacked the sessions, the conversations in the small groups around the room seemed to flow and flow and flow. People laughed, shared moments of faith, of life, of family, of hard times – the fruits of the Holy Spirit were abundant.

#### *'My Journey - Spiritual Learnings'*

The weekly sessions brought people together who had not met each other despite being regular parishioners; it was also an opportunity for new parishioners to get to know a large group of fellow parishioners; it was a time for refreshing the basic tenants of our faith and an opportunity to delve deeper into what it means to be a Christian; it was a time to be challenged and to grow.

The reflections by Fr Stephen Wang on various topics, including the street interviews with people brought each week a real tangible and down-to-earth approach to complex theological topics. Among the topics covered were: the existence of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments, finding freedom through knowing what is right and wrong, and moral guidance. He used examples from the saints, the Church Fathers, and his own personal experience about his childhood and ministry to young adults.

But Lent is not where Sycamore ended. As a continuation of faith formation opportunities, we ran another 6-week session called the Holy Spirit pathway in June/July, an Advent programme, and another Lent programme in 2024 in Blenheim. In Picton and Kaikoura three of us from the Discipleship Group invited the communities to partake in Taster Sessions which enabled them to run their own programme on a fortnightly basis. And now we plan to incorporate it into an RCIA programme.

The spiritual food that Sycamore provided has been abundant. Baskets were filled with scraps so that nothing was wasted, they were able to feed more, to go further, provided new opportunities that continue to give much food for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth.



How do we know when a parish is flourishing? One way is to look at parish statistics. The numbers shown in the annual mass count, financial giving, marriages, deaths, and sacraments of initiation give an insight into parishioner satisfaction. In 2011 I explored the impact of lay pastoral leaders (LPL) in parishes. Anecdotal evidence suggested that parishes with an LPL were exceeding expectations in terms of pastoral, spiritual, sacramental, and administrative care. My challenge was to find data that would support or trash the good news stories. At the time the archdiocese had an LPL in five parishes, and I researched the annual mass count and financial giving from 2001 – 2010. The figures were reliable because it was before any amalgamations had taken place and the mass counts were always done during the month of October.

The first two LPLs were appointed in 2006 so I had some great before-and-after material to work with. The results were remarkable. At a time when the archdiocese experienced an overall decrease in mass count of 1.8%, four of the five parishes with an LPL enjoyed an increase of between 8% and 58% within a year of their appointment. Financial giving was also significant. Where there was an increase in financial giving in the whole diocese of 4.4%, four of the five parishes achieved an increase of between 8% and 33%. While the data I collected is accurate, following my research there have been a series of amalgamations making more up-to-date data unreliable. The one parish led by an LPL that did not achieve an increase was experiencing a major pastoral issue that was out of the LPL's control.

A study published by Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) concluded that leadership grounded in purpose is four times more effective than leadership based on relationships – often referred to as transformational leadership (p.38). There had been an archdiocesan synod in 2006 followed by a booklet outlining goals and expectations. Suggestions on how the goals may be achieved were included and pastoral councils were asked to use the document as a blueprint in their pastoral planning. LPLs engaged their parishes with the material, so parishes were able to create a vision with clear measurable goals. The people had the sense of purpose that Robinson et al. said was so important.

Over the years there have many unsolicited comments made by priests and people in the pews who were collaborating with an LPL.

### *Some comments from our priests:*

- For the first time in my priesthood, I have the luxury of time to really focus on my Sunday homilies – it is such a gift.
- I am not on my own with some of the bigger tasks. It is good to have the support of the whole team.
- The lay pastoral leader has brought gifts to this parish that I do not possess.
- I am allowed so much more time to be a priest in a way that has never been possible before. I feel I am truly exercising my vocation.
- I am so grateful to be ministering with a lay pastoral leader as, without her, I would have no option but to retire.

### *Comments from parishioners:*

- When we heard we were losing our priest we felt abandoned, but now we have a lay pastoral leader and the support of a whole team of priests – we have never been so well served.
- It's business as usual.
- We love having a change of priest in the pulpit.
- I love seeing the priest and the lay pastoral leader working together. They have a lovely relationship full of respect for each other. It is a visual model of both vocations.

Lay pastoral leaders have served or are still serving in parishes around the archdiocese – most parishes have amalgamated since the appointment of the first LPL and some churches have closed. LPLs have ministered in Petone, Naenae, Brooklyn, Wilton, Newtown, Eastbourne, Carterton, Kaikoura, Richmond, Nelson, Metropolitan Cathedral, and Ōhāriu.

So, to get more people in the pews and money in the coffers – the results speak for themselves. Lay pastoral leaders are a winning formula. Comments are powerful as are the statistics. Cardinal Tom Williams listened to the people of God and tried something new in parish leadership and Cardinal John Dew continued the legacy. It has been a journey that is long enough to have an excellent track record. Well done to the many people who have made it possible.

Click to know the current Lay Pastoral Leaders of the ADW: <https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/about/church-mission/lay-pastoral-leaders/>

Reference: Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration. The University of Auckland and New Zealand Ministry of Education.

# ONLINE RESOURCES

- [Food for Faith](https://foodforfaith.org.nz/) <https://foodforfaith.org.nz/>
  - ◊ Launch Out in Homily Studio. We have Margaret Bearsley and Vicky Raw joining the Food For Faith podcast. <https://foodforfaith.org.nz/series/homily-studio/>
- [Final Report of the Royal Commission for abuse in care.](#)
  - ◊ [Prayer and penance for victims of sexual abuse.](#) This was written in 2017 by the National Liturgy Office. It is timely we pray it again. Other Christian churches are sending out their prayer of lament, another is from the [Anglican Catholic Diocese of Christchurch](#)
- [Belonging to this Land: Treaty Basics from a Christian Perspective. Two 90-minute video sessions exploring the story of the Treaty of Waitangi.](#) Produced by the Common Grace Aotearoa. You need to register as host to access the videos.
- Season of Creation [https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw\\_community/season-of-creation-activities-2024/](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw_community/season-of-creation-activities-2024/)



# UPDATES



EVENTS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE  
<https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/events/>



**Gathering of migrant communities and chaplaincies**  
 Launch Out Graduates **Telesia Alaimoana and Mikael Teofilo** helped **Maya** in putting together the multicultural Mass which was aimed at welcoming the migrant communities to the newly re-opened Cathedral. Around 60 people came to the multicultural Mass and the fellowship from the following communities-- Samoan, Filipinos, Fijians, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Spanish speakers, Indonesians, Tongans, Indians and the Ecology



Justice and Peace Commission of the ADW. View the details from the ADW website: [https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw\\_community/archdiocesan-gathering-for-our-migrant-communities-and-chaplaincies/](https://www.wn.catholic.org.nz/adw_community/archdiocesan-gathering-for-our-migrant-communities-and-chaplaincies/). The event is organised by the Office of the Vicar General, Church Mission and the Catholic Social Services.

## RETREAT WITH ALAN ROBERTS

Last 26-28 July, we were blessed to have Fr. Alan Roberts, lead us to a reflective weekend for the scripture readings for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time. The readings highlights 'bread' as a symbolism of God's abundant provision for our personal needs and the needs of our ministry. Alan, who is a master in meditation and contemplative imagination, brought in-depth insight into prayer life as the source of nourishment. We held it at Magnificat in Featherston, which seems to have become Launch Out's sacred stomping ground.



**Book Review :**  
***The Intelligence Trap***  
**by David Robson**

By Neil Vaney, sm  
Spiritual Director

Very rarely you read a book which, on finishing it, you exclaim, “Wow, if I had known this thirty years ago, it would have made such a difference to my teaching, career (and even my spiritual life)”. Such is David Robson’s *The Intelligence Trap*, (Hodder, 2020). The brunt of his research points to a clear disparity between IQ (and SAT tests in the USA) and what he describes as ‘wisdom-based learning.’ Whereas the former, focused on facts and reasoning processes, provides no immunity from serious and even stupid decisions, the latter, based on self-reflection, openness to change and social empathy, tends to lead to wider and happier careers and lives.

Robson begins by depicting blunders and inconsistencies of some highly intelligent individuals; two of his examples: Kary Mullis (Nobel prize winner and inventor of polymerase chain reactions) who also believes in astrology and visits by aliens, and the famed detective writer, Conan Doyle, (creator of the razor-sharp Sherlock Holmes), who clung to faith in spiritualism and seances. Later in the book, Robson contrasts these figures with Richard Feynman, responsible for the breakthrough in quantum electrodynamics which revolutionised the study of subatomic particles. At school he struggled with physics and maths, drawing and foreign languages. Determined to succeed, he taught himself through personal study of textbooks. Credited with an IQ of 125 – above average but well below the 140 needed to enter the prestigious Mensa Association.

In contrast, the author provides a vignette of the ‘Termites’, the famed group of highly intelligent children drawn together by Lewis Terman, whose IQ’s ranged from the 140’s to two young girls of 192. Terman was convinced that such intelligence was genetically based; the death of his prodigies without high achievement cast doubt on this assumption. Robson, on the other hand, focuses on what he labels as ‘evidence-based wisdom’, finding a wonderful

example in Benjamin Franklin and his critical role as an old man in the shaping of the US Constitution. The author underlines Franklin’s wide range of skills and experience, including social and emotional attributes such as self-reflection, humility and openness to the views of others.

In the second portion of his work Robson turns his attention to the flaws that often mark high intelligence. In his chapter entitled ‘A Bullshit Detector’ he examines ‘fake news’, and the reasons it hooks so many readers and listeners; he illustrates how glib presentations, fake experts and logical fallacies capture so many. Over two pages (156-57) he provides a succinct summary of fallacies such as appeal to authority, appeal to ignorance, misleading correlations, strawman arguments and false dichotomy with an explanation and example of each. He then offers, by way of contrast, methods to improve memory and learning, citing evidence to show that the belief that simplification, rote-learning and lengthy repetition are the most effective learning tools, is

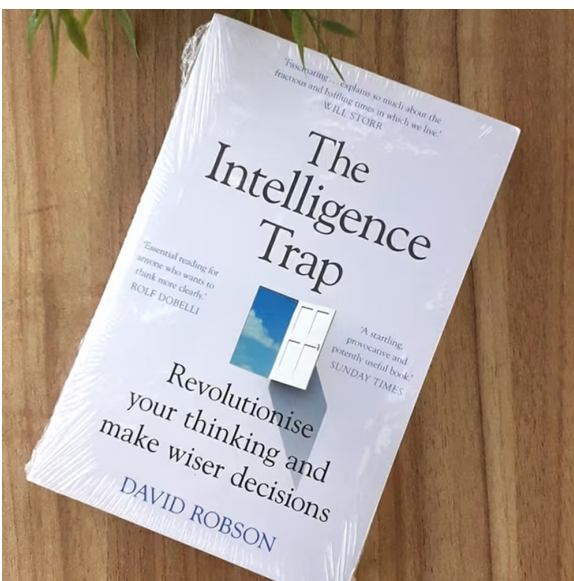


Photo copied from <https://www.iamtk.co/bookshelf/the-intelligence-trap>

simply untrue. It is rather struggle, failures and the search for links with previous learning that provide the strongest results. Though a fair base of starting knowledge is an important factor it is also tenacity, never giving up, and deep-seated curiosity that produce the most creative minds and leaders.

It was, however, Robson’s two final chapters, that most intrigued me. The first of these he labelled as the danger of dream teams. He kicks off with the famous example of the Iceland National Football team of 2016. Despite a tiny player base, desperate practice conditions and a part-time coach who worked as a dentist, the team strung together a series of wins in 2014 and 2015 to qualify for the 2016 World Cup finals. On the way, despite having just one of their squads playing in the top twenty European clubs, they also beat England, a side stacked with Champion League stars. The author underlines their cohesiveness, self-belief and loyalty as qualities that sparked the dream.

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In contrast, Robson then examines some examples of famous disasters: the Concorde smash of 2000, the disintegration of the Columbia shuttle in 2003 and the April 2010 Deepwater Horizon oilrig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, the source of catastrophic ecological destruction. Each of these projects was managed by a team of top experts in their field. In each case, earlier near-failures, complacency and a rush to complete work were significant factors. Robson's research underlines the discovery that in a wide variety of team projects ranging from sport to finance companies, despite input by a growing number of experts leading to increasing productivity, somewhere between 50%-60% of such specialists, the graph begins to drop and efficiency declines. In such skilled groups a perceived growth in tension, personal arrogance and refusal to contribute, seem frequently to become disabling factors.

Robson's study is fascinating, convincing and easy to read. It also has the ability to slot seamlessly into the Christian understanding of virtue ethics, especially the role of humility and wisdom in leadership. For this reason alone, it is a valuable guide for anyone involved in Launch Out study and leadership.

## Time in Tonga: Reflections of a Palangi

By Bridget Taumoepeau  
Pastoral Mentor

I am having the luxury of spending a couple of months in Tonga, escaping the New Zealand winter. Tonga was my home for about 12 years and where my children were born and spent their childhood. Since moving to New Zealand, we have continued to visit often and consider ourselves lucky to have homes in two cultures.

Bringing up a family involves nurturing their faith. I married into a Wesleyan family and in the wider family many different denominations were represented – various branches of the Wesleyan churches; Anglicans; Pentecostals;



*Small local parish near my home in Tonga.*

Mormons, but very few Catholics. Having come from an Irish/Scottish background wounded by sectarianism and violence and experiencing disapproval from my own family when I became a Catholic, it was a joy not to feel any religious discrimination from my Tongan family. I always felt that the fact that I was active in my church, and bringing up my children in a faith tradition, overcame any concerns that I was from a different denomination.

In those early years in Tonga, I was often the only *palangi* at church, and my involvement was mainly around Sunday Mass, although I got to know the religious communities well, especially through my medical profession. The sisters were very kind to me and most hospitable. An Australian nun took me under her wing and went out of her way to make sure that I was settling in well to the country. Initially there was no English Mass, and all other meetings and activities were held in Tongan. Although I learnt to speak the language, it is difficult to change one's language of prayer. The presence of a lone *palangi* at activities was rather unsettling for all concerned, although I rather regret not taking part in some of those things as it would have greatly improved my language skills and also helped me integrate better. It is interesting to imagine what would have happened if I had married into a

Catholic family. One happy exception to this lack of involvement was being invited to join the dance group that was part of the celebrations for the opening of the new basilica.



On this return to Tonga, it is an opportunity to reflect on the similarities and differences between the Church in New Zealand and Tonga. These observations are just that – impressions and reflections, not an analysis or study of the Church in two countries. I am not qualified to do that, as I am now a visitor in Tonga, and even when I was a resident, I was not a participant in many aspects of the Church. On the other hand, I have become much more involved in Church activities in my parish and diocese in New Zealand, which further complicates the comparison, as I have never held that role in Tonga.

In Tonga we happen to live close to a quite small local parish church and immediately I was reminded of the universality of the church. One feels comfortably at home – the decoration of the church; the beauty and familiarity of the liturgy, even if one cannot understand every word. (My own difficulties were mainly with the scripture readings and the homily, as the language is not your usual everyday vocabulary. Thank goodness for the ability to know what readings there would be, so I was able to take a bible to Mass and read them in English). The singing was exceptional. Unaccompanied, and everyone knowing the words to the hymns. The psalm was always sung, most beautifully. I was struck by the reverence of people in the church. Tongans are very sociable and chatty, but there was silence as we waited for Mass to begin, and afterwards people, after short greetings, left for home. My understanding of why this would be a contrast to the chatter in my New Zealand church and the morning tea afterwards, is that these people are well known to each other; they socialise in other ways; probably meet for other church activities such as choir practice and they are regular Mass attenders so there is no need to provide ‘welcoming’ activities.

Other thoughts were that the Church in New Zealand, over the years, has changed considerably. Numbers of churchgoers have declined; there are fewer priests, and many are now from overseas; parishes have combined with some churches closed and/or sold off; and the congregations have become very multicultural, including many parishioners of Pacific Island origin.

In Tonga, however, that is not the case. It is, after all, a fairly monocultural society. In fact, there are probably fewer *palangis* here than when I first lived in Tonga, as the old colonial-type system has disappeared. There are now many Chinese living and working here, but they do not join churches. When I attend Mass, I am usually the only non-Tongan present; nearly all the priests are Tongans, although the Sacred Hearts Fathers provide priests (some also with Tongan heritage) for the English-speaking community, and the vocations rate remains high; there is a high rate of Mass attendance, and new churches are being built. As a result of that, however, not much emphasis is laid on lay formation and there are no permanent deacons or designated Lay Leaders. Catholic clergy have always been held in high regard and the noble form of speech is used to address them. This has the risk of perpetuating clericalism, and I was somewhat startled to see a very elaborate chair for the priest, more like a throne, in my local parish church.

Tradition is highly respected in Tonga, as is evidenced by the importance of the royal family and hereditary nobles and many ceremonies etc. The king’s birthday was celebrated recently, and the country is covered in banners wishing him many happy returns. One part of the celebrations was a traditional kava ceremony, with special attention being paid to the fact that a young man was taking up his official role in the kava circle. There is a feeling that the Church too, may not be looking at change.



*Tongan youth leaders, who were at my presentation about formation .*

To be fair, however, they did embrace the Vatican II reforms quite rapidly, and it must have been a joy for them to be able to celebrate the liturgy in their own tongue. As described above, they are not experiencing the worrying changes in the church community that we see in New Zealand, so may not feel the need to change. However, it is very disappointing that an institute built by a local religious sister, specifically for lay formation programmes, has not been maintained and is now only used as a venue, rather than for ongoing courses etc.

The most striking contrast, however, is the presence and involvement of youth in the Tongan Church. There is a highly organised structure with a fulltime Youth Director, a council, and representatives from all the parishes. They plan a diocesan programme for the year, and I was truly fortunate to attend their meeting where they delivered reports of their activities. To put things in perspective there were about 40 Council leaders there, each representing large numbers of youth group members. This from a Catholic population of about 16,000. (New Zealand has about 500,000 Catholics.)

The Director had organised a vocation-drive over several weeks and throughout the different island groups, involving religious orders and diocesan priests. He expressed a concern about spiritual formation for the youth leaders and invited me to contribute to a weekend meeting for youth, due to my experience with lay formation, through the Te Hao-Launch Out programme.

My presentation took the form of a discussion with the youth (40 of them) about formation, particularly spiritual formation; leading a *lectio divina* meditation with them and then convening groups for spiritual conversation addressing their ideas on how to promote spirituality in their participants as well as looking at the barriers to that. It was obvious that they had little knowledge or experience of ongoing formation; retreats, spiritual direction, the Synod process or even the issues facing the Church throughout the world.

Churches in both countries face challenges – In New Zealand the rise of secularism accompanied by the drop in vocations, and even church affiliation, especially amongst the young, as well as the change to a very multicultural church; in Tonga there appears to be a lack of drive to continue the principles of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* from Vatican II, combined with a degree of complacency about the high rate of church attendance and of religious vocations, resulting in a lack of lay formation, including among youth. A challenge to us all may be to learn from each other to the mutual benefit of all.