

NZ Update – 9 October 2015

Ngongotaha Festival: *By Dennis Richards*

For the second time, the New Zealand festival was held at Ngongotaha, Rotorua, at the Willowhaven Holiday Park. On the whole, the weather was cloudy and fine, albeit a bit chilly. Sixty-two members from around the country gathered to celebrate God's grace and blessing in a setting of tranquillity and peace.

Spanning six days, the festival was launched with an evening gathering on the Monday (28 September) followed by a lovely supper and time to catch up with each other. The worship throughout the week was lively and varied. The first day included a worship and communion service in the morning prior to the opening service in the afternoon. With prayer being integral to Christian life, a group gathered for prayer before services each day. Also, a children's church operated for all but the first and last days. A strong theme appeared in the messages around graciousness and the depth of God's love. Which seemed well reflected in the animation evident in daily fellowship .

Family activities have always been a special feature of our celebrations. This year these began with an outing to the "aMAZEme" facility, comprising a maze built from 1.4 km of hedging, a display garden, small animal and butterfly enclosures, and other fun activities. Later that same day everyone gathered for a pot luck barbeque back at the



Singing together

Willowhaven's covered barbeque area. Then next day a games evening and dinner was put on by our Auckland congregation. Teams of budding "Sherlock Holmes" detectives worked to solve the mysterious disappearance of a painting using clues drip-fed to us during the evening by Lianne Trevarthen. Other team challenges and games for all ages made for a very enjoyable time together.

On the Thursday afternoon people gathered for a group discussion, which asked what a people focused on fellowship and communion looked like in our world. The format followed the World Café method in which people divided into table groups of four or five to discuss



Mulling the implications of who we are and might be

and record their ideas. After a short period people are scattered on to new tables and pick up the threads of the previous discussion recorded there. The purpose is to explore different perspectives and applications while maximising the cross fertilisation of ideas from the varied discussions. After three cycles of discussion, each table

reported its findings to the front. These were recorded by Brian Collins and Louis Smith then helped us make collective sense of the ideas that emerged. This also proved a lot of fun and was helpful for several who were able to tell their personal stories, which is also a central feature of the methodology.

The annual seniors' lunch for the over-sixties was held at the Landing Café beside the lovely Lake Tarawera, about a half hour scenic drive from central Rotorua. Judging by the atmosphere, which was buzzing with chatter over a lovely meal, everyone enjoyed a pleasant and relaxing afternoon together.

As is often said, each year seems better than the last. That may be nostalgia casting a rosy tinge over everything but it is also the consequence of deep and deepening friendships built over years of coming together as we have done to celebrate what God has done and will yet do in our group. It was sad to pack up and return home, but the "buzz" will undoubtedly last for some time, and help seed the excitement for next year, when we can gather once again and celebrate.

For my part, I wish to thank again all those who helped so ably to make this year's gathering one to be remembered and savoured.

Vanuatu Festival: *By Rex Morgan*

The Vanuatu festival was once again held at the village of Naveli, near Rory, on the island of Malekula. Our minister, Billy Taren, is the chief of Naveli village, where most of his family (4 sons, 2 daughters and their children) live. The weather was fine and warm (about 28°) throughout, in fact it was too fine, as the village is greatly in need of rain. Vanuatu has largely recovered from the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Pam in March, but is now beginning to suffer a drought, due to the current El Nino weather pattern. Isei Colati brought seeds from Fiji for the members' gardens when he visited in April, and the crops were doing well, but now are being severely affected by the prolonged dry period. This is also causing disruption to the village water supply, as the dam is running low. While we were there the supply hardly ran at all. When it did, some water was piped into our water tank, which was used very sparingly.



Rod and Ruth Matthews joined me at the Festival this year, for the first time since 1995. We were able to spend 5 days with our brethren at Naveli. Average festival attendance was 40, with the highest attendance of 58 last Sunday.

In his opening sermon, Rod told the members about their neighbouring family in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where he has visited several times. He also gave sermons on the way Jesus reveals the Father, and on the resurrection. I spoke about the importance of Jesus in God's plan, and on humility. Our sermons were translated into



Bislama by William Davies, who has now totally recovered from his fall of some weeks ago. A number of local members conducted the worship leading, gave sermonettes, and contributed in many other ways.

Festival activities included several group meals and a petanque competition, and two new members (Dao Elken and Maria Poumalis) were baptised at a nearby river one afternoon, with four ministers able to be involved in the baptisms.

All the members ate together for lunch each day outside the church hall. On the day Rod, Ruth and I arrived we were presented with beautiful aromatic leis, and everyone joined in a welcome dinner. Before long, five enjoyable days had zipped by and it was time for a group farewell meal before we took our flight back to Port Vila. We had just a day there, and were able to have lunch with John Davies, his daughter Letitia, and Evelyn Kanas, whose husband Euan had died just two weeks

earlier. Giselle Taren was able to take time off work to join us for a short time as well.

Needless to say, the Vanuatu members would really appreciate our prayers for rain to fall on their parched ground in the near future.



Rod presents special music



Pawpaws galore!



Billy Taren in his office



Petanque

