PCC bans plastic

THE Pacific Conference of Churches has banned plastic and Styrofoam on its premises and at its events.

A directive by General Secretary Reverend James Bhagwan has enforced a fine on any staff member who uses single use plastic bags, bottles, Styrofoam containers and straws.

The ban is in support of a PCC call in May for governments and churches to discuss greater cooperation to ensure the protection of the environment.

Regional ecumenical groups share resources

THE region’s three ecumenical organisations have joined forces to facilitate the 50th Anniversary of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

Key staff from the Pacific Theological College and Pacific Conference of Churches carried out strategic activities to ensure media coverage of the event.

Theresa Fox - a trained journalist working for the Institute of Mission and Research at the PTC provided comprehensive broadcast coverage for the SPATS 50th anniversary.

She was assisted by veteran journalist and former Fiji Times Editor in Chief, Netani Rika, who is Communications and Assets Manager at PCC.

An agreement between the PTC, PCC and SPATS allowed the inter-agency cooperation for the first time in many years.

““This is the beginning of greater cooperation and perhaps the formation of a regional ecumenical community,” said SPATS General Secretary, Reverend Rusiate Tuidrakulu.

“"The inter-organisation cooperation meant SPATS had access to specialist equipment and staff which we do not usually have.

“It was very encouraging.”
Papuans improve English skills

MEMBERS of the Gereja Kristen Injili Di Tannah Papua touched up on their English language skills in Jayapura last month.

Five members of the GKI—the largest Christian church in Papua—attended a two-week session with PCC trainer, Netani Rika.

The training was funded jointly by the Institute of Mission and Research of the Pacific Theological College and the GKI which is one of two PCC member churches in Papua.

The course participants were three ordained ministers—one of them a woman—and two lay workers.

Designed to identify candidates for further studies at the PTC, the course also helps in the capacity building of church staff members.

“We are very happy with the progress made over the two weeks,” said Jan Rumbraar, head of the GKI Partnership Department.

“It is important that as an emerging church our people be able to communicate in English with the world outside of Papua and Indonesia.”

The GKI is expected to send key staff for training—possibly for Masters in Theology—at the PTC later this year.

Support for Kanaky referendum

A LETTER of support from the Pacific Conference of Churches has been well received in Kanaky (New Caledonia).

Prior to a vote on independence in the French territory in May, PCC General Secretary Reverend James Bhagwan offered support to the Evangelical Protestant Church in New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands.

He also called for the Pacific church community to pray for a peaceful outcome to the vote.

Current indications are that the pro-independence lobby won the referendum/

Responding on behalf of the Kanaky church, Pastor Wakira thanked the PCC Secretariat and member churches for their support.

“‘We are hoping for change and thank you for your continued faith and support for us and our political leaders,” he said.
Video out

FIJI’S Roman Catholic Church has produced a video detailing the environmental and social impact of river dredging in a rural community.

The video will be shown at an international event to be hoisted by the Vatican.

PCC staff played an integral part in the production of the video as part of its support for member churches.

Solomons help

THE United Church in the Solomon Islands has been assisted in staff capacity building by the PCC General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan.

Church elders gathered in Mundu where Rev Bhagwan developed

Irish visitor

THE head of the Methodist Church in Ireland paid a courtesy visit to the PCC Secretariat in April.

Reverend Sam McGuffen was accompanied by Dr Julia Edwards who previously worked at the PCC on climate change.

Manasa leaves

YOUTH Programme staffer, Manasa Vatanitawake, has left the PCC after more than 10 years of service.

Joining the PCC in the Finance Department is Kinisimere Saratibau from the Methodist Church, Fiji.

CHURCHES must help find sustainable development solutions which protect the environment.

That was the warning from Pacific Conference of Churches General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan at a recent regional meeting.

Rev Bhagwan said the PCC and its member churches were instrumental in the Otin Tai Declaration of 2014.

“Since (then) the churches in the Pacific have advocated for the plights of Pacific communities affected by climate change to international communities, regional and national platforms as well as at community level,” Rev Bhagwan said.

“The prophetic role of the church also acknowledges the partnership with technical institutions and governments for support through information, data analysis, projects and capacity building in areas that contribute to the independent rethinking of scriptural interpretation and theology through the Pacific lenses to strengthen resilience.”

His warning came amid concerns in a number of Pacific countries over development which was destructive to forests, the mangroves and the sea.

“A deep spirituality permeates the communities of the Pacific and is at the heart of the Pacific people’s relationship with each other and the environment. It is integral to the way we interpret, understand and interact with one another, and with the natural world,’’ Rev Bhagwan said.

“The Pacific Conference of Churches affirms the call to faith communities made in the Talanoa Call to Action by the Presidents of COP23 and 24 for spiritual leaders to unlock spiritual pathways for addressing climate change.

”’As we seek to reweave the economic, ecological and eccumenical strands of the mat on which we all sit in the context of Climate Change, the Pacific Churches urge innovative and ecological frameworks for truly sustainable, decarbonised development that draw on the nature-affirming spiritualities of the Pacific and the rest of the world and incorporate the traditional knowledge and wisdom of Pacific and indigenous peoples.

“We call for the protection of all natural carbon sinks. We encourage the support by public and private sector of community-based initiatives that go beyond NDCs such as low carbon sustainable sea transport.’’

Rev Bhagwan said churches sought to build resilience and the Pacific Conference of Churches reaffirmed the regional Church leaders “Moana Declaration” of 2009, on climate change and the imminent threat of forced relocation and displacement faced by Pacific peoples.
Papua loses the way

WHILE Papua struggles for self-determination, it must not forget its Melanesian roots.

Pastor Willem Maloali (pictured) was just 27 when he attended the meeting in 1961 which led to the formation of the Pacific Conference of Churches.

At the time, Papua was Dutch New Guinea—a colony of the Netherlands which was granted independence in December 1961.

“As Papians we have lost our identity and become more Indonesian in everything we do,” Maloali said.

“There is an urgent need to find our way back, to reconnect with our identity to Melanesia because we are, after all, a Melanesian people.

“Slowly our culture and way of thinking has become more Asian than Melanesian.”

In 1961 Maloali and a Dutch missionary flew from Jayapura to Lae in Papua New Guinea and then to Port Moresby, Sydney, Nadi and Apia.

At each destination they transited for three days.

Despite the difficulties of air travel at the time, the two men had one mission.

“The church was seen as one of the instruments to help prepare Papuans for independence,” Maloali said.

“So we wanted to connect with Pacific communities which were looking towards independence at the time.

“It was young, emerging nations coming together to draw strength from each other,” Maloali said in an interview at his Jayapura home, that Pacific churches could help Papua by showing them contextual regional theology.

He said the Pacific had largely maintained its culture despite the passage of time.

“This is something that is missing in Papua and we must act before it is too late and we forget who we are.”

About Papua

Indonesia reacted violently with direct military action which was repelled by a joint Dutch-Papuan force in 1962.

By 1963 Indonesia with occupied Papua and then forced 1000 selected Papuans to vote for annexation in a United Nations mandated referendum.

In 1969 Indonesia declared Papua to be part of its republic despite agitation by locals which has endured until today.