Food for all, now

SURROUNDED by the offices of the United Nations, central government and mighty corporations, a food garden is taking shape in Fiji’s capital, Suva.

With Tropical Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 Pandemic disrupting the economy, the church has drawn from the old to meet a new challenge.

“‘We are taught to care for others—feed the hungry, care for the widow, support the orphan, love our neighbour,’” said PCC General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan.

“The food gardens we plant today will feed those in need three months from now.”

“These gardens will show ‘God’s love to all people who walk past on the street.’

“No colour, no ethnicity, no creed and most of all—no charge.”

Tavioka (manioc), bele (island cabbage) and bananas are already on the site.

New plots created in April will provide corn, beans, cabbages, capsicum and other nutritious food.

Bishop Henry Bull of the Anglican Church blessed the new garden and the Food Bank concept via video conferencing from his parish in Dreketi, some 200 kilometres away.

Bishop Bull has implemented a similar concept to use the land available to his parishioners.

Once crops from the PCC Gardens are ready, they will be distributed from a roadside stall in full sight of government offices whose staff have already asked for and received planting material.

Some of the food will be distributed to informal settlements, aged care facilities and residents of homes for the destitute.

The land on which the project is being implemented sits on the edge of the Central Business District and has been earmarked for development into rental offices. The need to feed the hungry has taken precedence over revenue generation.

“‘Let us feed God’s people first,’” Rev Bhagwan said.

The PCC also has plans to develop a farm outside Suva.


Vanuatu, Tonga show Interest

NATIONAL councils of churches in Tonga and Vanuatu have responded to the new PCC programme to provide food for the needy.

The Vanuatu Christian Council has sought funding to create food gardens to feed communities.

Money will be sent once documentation is completed.
Miners chase pilgrims

ANGRY mine officials chased a team of pilgrims from the World Council of Churches during a visit to Fiji in February.

The WCC Pilgrims for Justice were in the Ba Province in the West of Fiji to take a closer look at the effects of extractive industry on the lives of villages at Votua.

Pilgrims from Colombia, Germany, India, Korea and Russia were in a small boat looking at dredging operations when mine officials intervened.

The visit had been organised by the local Roman Catholic parish in consultation with villagers.

Mine officials and security guards blocked the WCC Pilgrims from taking pictures but the team was able to speak to villagers.

Black sand rich in magnetite is being dredged at Votua by the Sino-Australian company, Amex, which ships the mineral to China.

Villagers claim that they have received no money from the extraction and that the dredging has killed valuable fish and crab stocks— their only livelihood.

Villagers tell of damage from extractive industry

VILLAGERS from three regions of Fiji have told Pilgrims for Justice and Peace of the immense damage caused by extractive industry.

At Dawasamu on the eastern coast of the main island, Viti Levu, the extraction of gravel and redirection of a local river has destroyed coral and fish.

An eco-tourism resort which hosted visitors to the nearby Moon Reef has been forced to close because of excessive silt at sea.

“We cannot survive because our fish are dying and the tourists won’t come when the can’t see the dolphins at Moon Reef,” said local tourism operator, Joey Bau.

Women have been the worst affected by extraction of gravel and sand.

In most Fijian coastal villages, women are the primary gatherers of food.

“We have pleaded with the government but nobody listens to us,” one woman told the Pilgrim team.

“We suffer every day because the government will only listen to big business.”

https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/pilgrims-plant-peace-garden

Teams see impact of climate change, poverty, drugs

FOUR teams of pilgrims landed in Fiji, late February as a tropical cyclone descended on the islands.

That did not stop the World Council of Churches representatives from visiting communities impacted by climate change issues, displacement and gender based violence and poverty.

The teams also spoke with community members on the issues of drugs and prostitution in urban areas.

Following the visit the four teams compiled separate reports for the WCC.
Islanders

Vote for freedom

PACIFIC churches were able to observe the Bougainville Referendum vote last year.

Daily reports were sent to the churches through a PCC Observer at the historic vote.

An overwhelming 98 per cent of islanders voted for independence from Papua New Guinea.

The result of the vote must now be ratified by PNG’s parliament.

Appeal raises

Cash for fire victims

PACIFIC churches responded to the deadly bush fires in Australia by sending money and prayers.

At the Holy Trinity Anglican Cathedral, Suva, the bell was tolled for those killed in the fires.

It was also tolled for the animals and wildlife destroyed.

The PCC sent money for the relief effort and cash was also received by Australia from churches in Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Pohnpei.

Australia’s Minister for the Pacific, Alex Hawke, thanked the PCC and its member churches for their prayers and financial support.

Focus on Papua, Nuclear

INDONESIA has ramped up its activities on social media around the issue of West Papua.

This follows public anger over the killing of protesters by security forces late last year. Indonesia hopes to draw sympathy by blaming Papuan opposition groups for the deaths of soldiers and police.

Meanwhile, the nuclear issue has resurfaced with the PCC addressing a Fijian parliamentary sub-committee. Fiji has been urged to ratify an international treaty banning nuclear weapons.

https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/weapons-no-good-for-pacific-world

Study on safe churches

A STUDY in the Solomon Islands and Federated States of Micronesia will look at keeping churches safe.

Of particular concern is the safety of children but there will also be a focus on women.

The first phase of the project was completed before COVID 19 restrictions.

More information is available at www.pcc.org.fj
Virus not a punishment

THE global pandemic caused by the Corona Virus is not a punishment from God.

In a pastoral letter to Pacific church leaders, PGG General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan, raised concern over messages from some faith communities.

In Fiji, the Korean Grace Road Church published a full page advertisement claiming that COVID-19 was a sign of the end of the world.

Bhagwan said it was important for all Christians to act responsibly towards each other and practice good hygiene.

“If we believe that God is love, it is our duty to be safe and keep others safe at this time,” Bhagwan said.

“It is not a time to spread fear and hate but instead to show our faith in God by the way we live and care for others.”

https://pacificconferenceofchurches.org/f/virus-is-not-a-punishment

Help prevent this pandemic

CHURCHES are in a unique position to change public opinion and build a better world after COVID-19.

While the world focusses on what is being labelled the New Normal (life after the pandemic), churches know that abundance of life can be found in living according to God’s plan.

The PCC has started a campaign based on Genesis 1 (and God saw that it was good) and John 10:10 (abundant life) to call for a return to spiritual values.

Bible studies on how to be a responsible Christian post COVID-19 will be rolled out shortly.

COVID 19 Sends Services On-line

PACIFIC churches have gone on-line to provide services and spiritual nourishment for congregations.

The Roman catholic churches in Fiji and Tonga provided Masses by social media throughout Holy Week.

These services have continued into the Easter Season and many churches have used social media to reach their congregations in the Pacific and beyond.

In some cases Pacific diaspora churches have beamed services into the region every Sunday.

This is a direct response to the ban on church gatherings due to COVID-19

Send us your stories

WHAT’S happening in your country or church?

How is your faith community making a difference or handling these unusual times? We’d really love to know and spread the message of your good work.

Please email us your stories and pictures to media01.pcc@gmail.com and we’ll tell the world about you.