

Story: Pacific churches in New Zealand

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## Page 2. Programmes and services

### Church as a village

The demand for faith communities in New Zealand, and the form that they took, reflected the role of churches in Pacific societies. Island community life and personal social identity were built around three closely integrated institutions: family, church and village. This structure was recreated in New Zealand with new or existing church communities acting as surrogate villages. Those who had identified as members of a particular family, denomination and village back home could continue to do so. Within this structure the minister or pastor was akin to a village chief – the most powerful and respected figure in the church community.

### First Tokelauan mass

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Petone in Lower Hutt has a strong Tokelauan community. In 1985 a mass was held in the Catholic Sacred Heart Church to celebrate the first missal (prayer book) with a Tokelauan text. It was the first time the congregation had heard the Mass in their own language.

### A sporty church

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Sport is a strong feature of Pacific church communities. Many field teams in a wide range of codes. In 2009 the Pacific Islanders Presbyterian Church in Newtown, Wellington, was represented in

### Programmes and activities

As in the village, the church became the focus of social life for many migrant families. Alongside religious worship, churches provided programmes of activities which included social and professional advice, health and educational services, sport, music and social activities for various age groups.

The range of programmes and activities varies between denominations and individual congregations. Some denominations, such as Catholics, Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, provide centralised programmes which limit local autonomy. Mormon programmes are highly structured, with activities based on age and marital status. Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist churches have greater local autonomy and are freer to determine the shape of their religious worship and social programmes.

### Degrees of autonomy

The ways that local autonomy was exercised depended significantly on the religious and lay leadership. Churches whose parent church was in the Pacific Islands, such as the Samoan Congregational Christian Church, recreated the religious forms, governance structures and social programmes of Samoan villages. These are based on indigenous models in which power rests mainly with

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bowls, football, netball, volleyball and kilikiti (Samoan cricket). In that year their women's kilikiti team came fourth in the Wellington regional competition.

males. They typically favour conservative religious agendas and worship styles, and run limited social programmes. The organisation of these church communities serves those who want to maintain traditional religious values and customs.

Other congregations have established a range of new religious and social activities which respond to contemporary needs in the New Zealand context.

## Inter-agency links

The most comprehensive programmes are typically in congregations where clergy have recruited younger, well-educated lay personnel into leadership roles. Their skills and social networks have enabled congregations to secure funds, advice and services from public and private agencies to support and extend their programmes. Some government agencies have looked to churches to deliver educational, health, employment and other social programmes to Pacific populations.

## Healthier churches

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In 2005 the Counties Manukau District Health Board gave 50 Pacific Island churches a grant as part of its LotuMotu programme to support health promotion and disease prevention. Each church received either \$3,000 or \$5,000 towards a programme of their choice. At the Ōtara Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church, the Reverend Uea Tuleia introduced an exercise and healthy eating programme. He joined the exercise class and reduced his weight from 140 to 89 kilograms.

Early childhood education centres, Pacific language nests, and homework and adult education classes have been established on church premises. Some churches have co-sponsored anti-domestic abuse programmes. Others have used members' professional contacts to ensure Pacific peoples' voices are heard in public policy debates. A few churches have formed partnerships with research groups and community projects, providing data and information in return for advice and assistance.

## Church services

Services of worship are held on Sundays, and on Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas. The form of liturgy (service) follows that laid down by the particular denomination, but normally includes the singing of hymns and praise songs, prayers, a sermon, the collection of an offering, and church notices. Catholics celebrate communion (the Mass) every Sunday; Presbyterians do so monthly. Some congregations have pipe organs and large choirs, while others make do with pianos or guitars. Most services last about an hour, but some can go on much longer, depending on the denomination or congregation.

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