

Who is Our Neighbour? -Pacific Islands Climate

by Tim Prescott, Forster, NSW



**Mission Prayer -
God, where will your Spirit lead today? Help me be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant me courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.**

During many years of exploring my spiritual journey I hear the call “Who is our neighbour?” We witness the challenges of refugees fleeing persecution, First Nations peoples lamenting the loss of country and the cry for God (and us) to intervene, the silent suffering of victims of domestic violence and the hurt of sexual abuse. Our neighbours, the Pacific Island nations, have significant relevance for us in the context of rising sea levels as the impact of climate change threatens the culture and way of life on these low-lying islands. Rising seas are flooding communities and worsening erosion causing increasing anxiety for residents.

Oceans are amazing and the beauty of the Pacific Ocean has a real presence in my seaside environment. I constantly see the vast wonder of blue horizons, hear the pounding waves through the still night and smell the salty spray of God’s creation - the ebb and flow of life.

Over the years Marion and I have been blessed to travel and explore many Pacific Islands with landscapes of palm trees, coral reefs, historic cultures and abundant tropical fruit. The gentle happy people welcome visitors to their exotic shores with warm smiles, romantic music and genuine friendship. I recall a special visit to the remote village of Paelau on Tabuaeran (Fanning Island), a small atoll of 33.7 square kilometres in the Republic of Kiribati, a remote part of Micronesia in the Central Pacific. Kiribati comprises 33 coral islands with an average elevation of 2 metres.

The average sea level has risen by 3.2mm per year since 1993 and this is catastrophic for the island populations and coastal regions. This small island being swallowed up as a result of climate change is only one of our many Pacific Island neighbours.

On 2nd of June this year, only weeks before COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions, Marion and I were in Sydney for medical appointments when suddenly I received a Facebook invitation to a special event that evening at St John's Anglican Church in Glebe. I did not hesitate to respond as I drove through city traffic to attend "**A Prayer Service for Climate Justice**" hosted by Christians Together for Climate, Common Grace, Scarred Tree Indigenous Ministries and St John's Anglican Church. This unique ecumenical event was being held on the eve of Mabo Day during Reconciliation Week. Greeted by a gathering of diverse people, uplifting music, colourful banners and knitted climate scarves I sat in awe in a beautiful 1870 sandstone church joining like-minded communities to pray and act on climate justice—for our neighbours!

Acknowledgement of Country was presented by Pastor Elder Uncle Ben Harry, a Torres Strait Islander descended from Aboriginal peoples and Pacific Island slaves (60,000 were brought from Vanuatu to Queensland in the late nineteenth century). Native songs from Tuvalu, hymns, short films, prayers, testimonies, and Good Samaritan scripture reflections contributed to a powerful service calling for truth, justice, healing, peace and human rights action. An inspiring evening revealed that faith and solidarity show no colour. Discussion circles over a gourmet fellowship supper included the impact of colonisation, destruction of habitat, commitment to renewable energy, United Nations legal actions, ocean erosion and impacts of climate change. Challenging statements from committed leaders reflect some of the innovative themes:-

"I have said that we have to sit together in our pain, stand together against injustice and walk together in truth and friendship. It is the same for creation justice." Brooke Prentis, CEO Common Grace, Waka Waka Women, Coordinator of Grasstree Gathering.

"We've insulted our Creator's handiwork. Let us repent." Pastor Ray Minniecon, Kabikabi, Gurang-Gurang and Ambrym Islander, St John's Church Glebe.

"Our Islands are at the frontline of climate inaction. How many times must I tell my story?" Maina Talia, Climate Justice Advocate and Theologian, Tuvalu.

Our near neighbours, Torres Strait Islanders, are also on the frontline of the climate crisis. Urgent action is needed to ensure they can remain on their Islands as king tides, erosion, inundation and coral bleaching are threatening the homes and cultures of these people.

Prayer for Torres Strait Islands Climate Justice

*Papa God, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. You are holy and merciful Papa, everything comes from you;
You are the Creator of the universe; creation looks to you O Lord;
In the beginning just by your breath, you spoke, the lands and the seas manifested by your words, your light is the sun, the moon and the stars; it reminds us of your eternal light you bring into our world;
We look to you O Lord;
Papa God, As you joyfully declared and created all the lands and seas in the Torres Strait Islands, you had a good day! Your love and favour looked upon us and you created us as your people, we are grateful for the bountiful blessing we receive from your creation; Our Island, Our home, Our Culture;
We look to you O Lord;
Papa God, Continue to give us strength, as we marvel at the miracle of your creation;
As our constant reminder, the Southern Cross that shines in our southern skies forever over our islands, and our nation as our eternal navigator. As the gift of life is revealed through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who gave His life on that old rugged Cross.
O Lord, every year the Torres Strait Islands celebrate The Coming of the Light as we honour your message of sacrifice and love, we give you all the glory and praise; may we continue to bring light into this world together as we look to you O Lord;
Loving Papa God, we thank you for hearing our prayers, giving us your words and encouraging us in our meeting together...we say: Take us and use us to love and serve you, and all people.
In the power of your Spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This prayer was written for the Prayer Service for Climate Justice by Elder Ben Harry, a Torres Strait Islander, and Larissa Minniecon, a Kabikabi woman and Torres Strait Islander woman.

The Community of Christ is called in Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d and 163:4c to "Pursue Peace on and for the Earth and to...bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems of... environmental deterioration".

Do you hear the call? **Who is our neighbour?**

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Member of the Australian Earth Stewardship Team since 2012 and Member of the World Church Earth Stewardship Team since 2020