



UNITY in DIVERSITY

by Mareva Arnaud

A period of great sadness and uncertainty has touched the entire world. A period during which unfortunately many lives have been lost, because of the pandemic.

For many months the Polynesians have been following the data published each day: curves and numbers showing the infection rate and indicating the number of people who have died. During this period, out of the confusion and the fears, differences have emerged. During this period, amidst the confusion and fear, differences have emerged. Obey the instructions to stay home to protect the most vulnerable, but also push people to leave their homes to help those with the greatest needs. The main "legal" hospital was saturated, and a makeshift medical centre opened. Numerous voices, animated by the same love for the population, spoke out, encouraging or discouraging vaccination.

One family lost a friend during the year ; another lost eleven, all from the same branch. The journey was serene and calm for some, trying and frustrating for others.

According to the living conditions, the experiences, the emotions, the culture, the beliefs or the character... each person experienced and responded to this pandemic in different ways.

And amidst such a diversity of life, getting through this ordeal with a bond of peace and unity, for a population that was suffering, was difficult to the point of being almost impossible.

Nonetheless, it is this devastating atmosphere of life and death that united and brought together all of the differences.

Beyond the churches, the political parties, the organisations, regardless of the beliefs or the origins, the entire population was invited to commemorate the persons who had left us, often in very solitary conditions. The population was invited to participate in a few hours of fasting, accompanied by a temporary abstinence from all electrical usage, and a service of prayer or meditation, where candles were lit to express our compassion for the families in mourning and raise up hope. And it happened. Even in the streets, small groups of homeless people gathered, sitting on the sidewalks, around a humble candle. Everywhere, this light shone, and the population, in all its diversity, communed together.

The Polynesian garland of seashells is made up of hundreds or even a thousand small seashells drilled and sewn onto a fibre backing. A task that is time-consuming, meticulous and fastidious. An undertaking that demands a lot of time. Women go out each day in search of seashells, in the soil, on the coral or in the

sand... And then comes the cleaning, the drying, the sorting and the drilling. And to cap it all off, they are strung, linked or assembled on a thread. These garlands, made with tenderness, are much more than just a decoration to put around the neck. They are offered as a gesture of love, of welcome, of a relationship that can't be broken and of an unforgettable connection between each other.

Our lives are like these seashells, unique, each person has their own plan and calling. They are formed and shaped by the paths our lives take. Each person has their own history and place. Happy and tested at certain moments, alone and surrounded at other moments... And we create a universal connection, we are all joined together by the thread of divine love. This unity highlights diversity, where each person helps sublimate the beauty of the other. Each life is a precious seashell!

This unity taught by Jesus is a gift from God that doesn't erase all of our differences. It is not "forced integration" nor a "marginalisation-harmonisation". On the contrary, it is a diversity that is reconciled and that embraces and honours all of the richness of each population, each culture, each individual...

President Steve. M Veazey has said "Jesus did not die on the cross to reinforce human differences like Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female, high caste and low caste, and tribe and clan. He died and lived again to establish our oneness and equality as children of God. And the whole creation is groaning in waiting for a church that will visibly demonstrate what Christ has achieved. I believe with all my heart Community of Christ is becoming that church. This counsel urges us to accelerate our efforts in that direction!"*

More than ever today, let's be those seashells, linked and united into garlands, that we put around the neck of those around us, so that with love we can elevate Unity in Diversity.

* "Oneness and Equality in Christ" - April 12 2015 Stephen M Veazey - The President's Address to the Church.

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