

TALANOA TOKTOK

Official Publication of the Pacific Conference of Churches

Walk the talk

A DELEGATION from the Presbyterian Church-USA visited the Pacific in September.

The visit allowed PCC-USA to engage with communities living with climate change difficulties.

Partnerships lead to partnership



Hand in hand ... a briefing for the PC-USA at Togoru in Fiji

All one body

ONE challenge facing churches on the climate change issue is how to work together for the Body of Christ.

The Presbyterian Church-USA has collaborated with Pacific churches to improve the lives of people in the region.

In Fiji, Kiribati and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, PC-USA has met churches and community members, seeing first hand the ravages of sea level rise.

A delegation from the PC-USA visited the region in September.

In Fiji, the delegation spent time at Togoru which has struggled with rising sea levels and salt water intrusion for more than 50 years.

The PC-USA team, accompanied by Pacific Conference of Churches staff members, sat with the community to listen to their stories.

They also took the opportunity to walk along the coastline, wading through water which had once been a playing ground for the community. Community women accompanies the team on the coastal walk, sharing their stories of struggle.

"It was an opportunity to talk about our issues with others," resident, Caroline Dunn said.

"We speak to people in Fiji but few have listened to us. We're happy to talk about our issues in the hope that people outside the country can learn from our situation."

Togoru residents are members of the Methodist Church in Fiji and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.

But in the battle against climate change, theological beliefs take a back seat.

Talanoa Toktok



50 years lost

Community tells it's sorry tale

WHEN Barney Dunn was growing up, he played along the shore at Togoru - about 45 minutes from the Fijian capital, Suva.

But over the last 50 years, the coastline has reduced by more than 100 meters as the sea gradually but inevitably claws away at sand, soil and the grass.

"Where we played as children is no longer there," Dunn said.

"We have lost trees, soil, grass, our playing area and fruit trees.

"Very soon the sea will be at our doorsteps and nobody seems able or willing to help us."

Discussions with the Fijian government have ended in a simple suggestion which is unacceptable to the community.

"The only way the government wants to help us is for us to leave this place which has been in the family for more than 100 years," Dunn said.

"But this is what our forefathers left us - this land. How can we leave? We will have to start all over again. It's impossible."

His cousin, Caroline, leads community efforts to fight back on behalf of the women.

"We can see the water levels rising and the salt does a lot of damage to the plants," she said.

"That means women must work harder to provide food for the families and we certainly need help."

Caroline is also concerned about the lack of safety for women and children during cyclones and floods.

The nearest evacuation centre is over six kilometres away through mangrove swamps.

"What we need is an evacuation centre here in the community," Caroline said.

"We cannot afford the carrier fare to the evacuation centre."



Swamped ... Frances Namoumou (left) and Dianne Walker of Presbyterian Church -USA in a mangrove swamp at Togoru in Fiji

A journey together

IN partnership, the Presbyterian Church USA and the Pacific Conference of Churches work for the betterment of God's people.

The PCC has benefitted from funding for small projects through the PC-USA. And the PCC has provided technical support to the PC-USA in its focus group on global partnership development.

PCC Climate Justice expert, Frances Namoumou, said the partnership was an example of how church organisations could work together.

"We appreciate the help of the PC-USA and are thankful that they consider us equal partners in discussions at a global level."

PCC Development Manager, Netani Rika, assists the PC-USA in its global consultation forum.



About

PC-USA

THE Presbyterian Church in the USA has over 1.7 million members in 10,000 congregations.

It has partnered with the Pacific Conference of Churches in the area of climate change and the Lomana Na Vulagi Eco-Farm. It also supports Presbyterian churches in the region.

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