



# Pacific Conference of Churches

[www.pcc.org.fj](http://www.pcc.org.fj)

**Moderator**

*Rev. Dr. Tevita Havea*

**General Secretary**

*Rev. James Bhagwan*

*e-mail : [GenSec@pcc.org.fj](mailto:GenSec@pcc.org.fj)*

*Mobile (679) 5085487*

*G.P.O Box 208, Suva.*

*4 Thurston Street, Suva, Fiji*

*Tel: (679) 3311 277 / 3302332*

*Fax: (679) 3303 205*

---

## **Message to the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Oceania General Assembly**

Your Eminences, Excellencies, Dear friends,

In 1749, in Dublin, an Anglican Priest named John Wesley, who had begun a spiritual revival and reformation of sorts which was to eventually become the Methodist Movement/ Church wrote the following words in as he concluded a letter:

“Let us endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom. So far as we can, let us always rejoice to strengthen each other’s hands in God”.

The title of this correspondence was “Letter to a Roman Catholic.”

I bring you greetings from your sisters and brothers in Christ from across the waitui, the moana, the solwara – from the 33 member churches and 10 national councils of churches across the 19 Pacific Island states and territories – from West Papua in the West, to Marshall Islands in the North, to Aotearoa in the South and Maohi Nui in the East - that make up the Pacific Conference of Churches.

Since in 1976 CEPAC has been a member of the PCC and has a significant role within the PCC structure, and constitution with the General Secretary of CEPAC a Trustee and a representative of CEPAC on the Executive.

In 1991 this ecumenical bond was strengthened by the membership of the Conference of Bishops in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Our staff includes a number of Catholics in senior management roles.

I would like to express my sincere vinaka vakalevu for your kindness in allowing me to bear witness to this gathering of hearts and minds.

Yesterday, the homily shared during the divine office and mass, based on the story of Jesus encounter with the Syrophenician woman, led me into a reflection on the food for the children, the scraps of which the dogs were able to partake and how even among the challenges we face in our ecumenical journey, we can support and nourish each other.

Being present for some of the significant moments of this Assembly and from an observers point of view, I have been greatly nourished from the choice morsels I have been able to pick up, not from the floor but from the sidelines.

I have been nourished by the process of the Spiritual Conversation – which through Archbishop Peter Loy Chong in his role as the President of the Fiji Council of Churches, we engaged ecumenically and were able to discern a message to the political parties negotiating to form a coalition government following the General Elections last year. You saw the result on Wednesday night in your engagement with our Prime Minister.

This process – in a region with many different cultures – including cultures of speaking and cultures of silence – is now something I hope, with the support of CEPAC and CBPNGSI, to trial in this years Pacific Church Leaders Meeting scheduled for May this year in the Marshall Islands, with a view to incorporating it into the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches which will be held in Noumea, Kanaky New Caledonia from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> of November this year. .

For a region where many of our faith communities use the symbol of the canoe – the vaka, the drua, takia – the process of synodality – of journeying or voyaging together is a process from which many churches and the ecumenical movement can learn. It is a gift which I hope can be shared to your other sisters and brothers in Christ. We are all sailing towards that Island of Hope which is the Kingdom of God. It is my fervent prayer that our canoes – and in particular the communities that sail onboard may journey more closer together in that voyage.

I noted your discussion on the structure of the FCBCO and the journey over the next few years to Australian Assembly. We at PCC understand very well the challenges of regional coordination – particularly across our ocean very well. I affirm the process of discernment for a secretariat for the FCBCO and we at the PCC Secretariat stands ready to collaborate, support and fellowship with it.

Over the last few days, you have listened to the Tagi of creation – the groaning of the land and the ocean. I am what you call a Kaiwai – a person of the sea – as a standup paddleboarder, leading campaigns on ocean health and working with traditional voyaging communities as their chaplain. I am grateful for your willingness to be the roar of the waves and the cry of the land – acknowledge the statement on the ocean is important message for our region as we seek to hold the Pacific Blue line against exploitation of our common ocean home.

The issues articulated in the Tagi Production – Ecological Stewardship and Climate Justice, Political, Social, Economic and Cultural Self Determination – particularly for our communities in West Papua as well as Maohi Nui and Kanaky, are central pillars of our work at the Pacific Conference of Churches, along with Gender Justice, Child Protection, Youth engagement and empowerment and the issue of modern slavery and migrant labour (PALM Scheme in Australia, the RSE in Aotearoa, Seafarers and migrant labour from Micronesia to the US). These are common concerns of all of the

Household of God in the Pacific. We extend our hand of fellowship, collaboration and common witness through pastoral, prophetic and practical engagements on these concerns.

I thank Archbishop Peter Loy Chong and the organisers of the Assembly for allowing me to contribute to the pre-Assembly process and be present this week. My wife who is Catholic is very impressed – so thank you for helping me score some extra credits with her... and my in-laws.

On a personal note – as someone who is inspired by the prayer of our Lord for the unity of believers in John 17:20 and 21, to strive for a visible expression of our unity in the midst of our brokenness – I commend to you that as people of Oceania – as Wansolwara – One Salt Water People – our willingness to be community – amidst a human and ecological diversity that is unmatched anywhere else on this our common home. There is a difficult, urgent and common task we share – that of the ecological conversion of our region and the rest of the world. Ecumenically we have an opportunity to join our hands in this sacred task of helping to reweave God's great ecological mat – removing those toxic strands which harm and strengthening those which bring justice and healing for all God's creation.

May God's blessings and travelling mercies be with you as you return to your communities and as we continue the work to which we have been called.



Rev. James Bhagwan  
General Secretary  
Pacific Conference of Churches

*10<sup>th</sup> February 2023*  
*The Pearl, Deuba, Fiji Islands*