

Pacific Conference of Churches' Regional Working Group on Child Protection and Safeguarding¹

A Call to Action for Protecting God's Precious Gifts from Violence

PREAMBLE:

Jesus' preferential treatment of children in the synoptic gospels is echoed in the words, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these," (Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

Recognising this loving concern Jesus showed for the children, 25 Church Leaders and Child Protection Enablers from the United Church of Christ in the Marshall Islands, Anglican Church of Melanesia, Catholic Archdiocese of Honiara, Catholic Diocese of Auki, United Church of the Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands Christian Association, Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Suva, The Presbyterian Church of Fiji, Fiji Council of Churches, Kiribati Uniting Church and Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu gathered for a 3-day ecumenical meeting between Monday 2nd and Wednesday 4th of October 2023 in Nadi, Fiji, on the Church's need to protect children from violence.

This regional meeting concluded a four-year pilot programme where training and community implementations on Child Protection were facilitated in Fiji, the Marshall Islands, and Solomon Islands.

The working group shared powerful learning experiences from PCC's 2020 – 2023 Pilot Programme which contextualised highly sensitive issues on the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of Pacific children today.

THE CALL:

A key outcome from this meeting is the submission of this declaration to the 12th sitting of the PCC General Assembly:

WE STRONGLY CONDEMN all acts of violence and abuse that affects the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological lives of all children and families in the Pacific.

The Bible reminds us that, "... whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea," (Matt 18:6). This serves as a reminder that children hold a special place in the Kingdom of Heaven and they are not to be harmed (Matt 19:14).

¹ New International Version is used for all Bible verses

Jesus also stated that, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Matt 18:5), signifying the close identity children have in God.

Therefore, any act of violence upon a child, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion, is an act of violence against the Body of Christ, against God, against the family, community, nation, and humanity.

WE AFFIRM our Christian commitment and responsibility to protect all children from violence and abuse because they are precious gifts from God (Psalm 127:3) who require our love, guidance, and understanding.

WE STAND in solidarity as the Body of Christ and say **“STOP!”** the sin of Violence against children and protect them from harm so that generational cycles of abuse can come to an end and children can grow up in wisdom, stature, and favour with God and people.

WE LAMENT the alarming statistics throughout the region on child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Calling for Pacific Churches to champion the needs of our children to grow up safely and securely.

WE AMPLIFY the urgent need for churches to recognise their important role of PREVENTING violence against children through Christian messaging and community initiatives that highlight children’s dignity as little ones created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and known personally by God from conception (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5).

We COMMIT to working together in communities we have been entrusted with for the protection and safeguarding of children to ensure the Church of Christ is handed over to a generation of people who are healed and delivered from legacies of childhood violence and abuse by:

- Endorsing in principle, the training manual, subject to finalization by the PCC Child Protection Team
- Endorsing the Diploma in Child Protection & Safeguarding in the Pacific, the Certificate Level V in the Child Protection & Safeguarding: The Foundation, the Certificate Level V in the Child Protection & Safeguarding: The Church, as well as the Certificate Level V in the Child Protection & Safeguarding: The Community
- Recommending the Diploma Curriculum be brought before the Pacific Church Leader’s Meeting, PCC’s Women’s Pre-Assembly, Youth Pre-Assembly and General Assembly for endorsement.
- Recommending that the Development Phase of the Certificate Courses in the Diploma (Course writing, Course Reviews, etc.) be included in the PCC Strategic Plan/Budget and the Child Protection work Program from 2024 onwards.
- Recommending the establishment of the Regional Child Protection and Safeguarding Advisory Group be funded and recognized in the Pacific Ecumenical Community Charter as a Consultative Body to the 3 Regional Ecumenical Institutions – South Pacific

Association of Theological Schools (SPATS), Pacific Theological College (PTC) and the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). Formation of the group can be made up of those in attendance of the Child Protection Regional Meeting.

We REAFFIRM our call for people of faith and good will to respond to the needs of children who are poor, homeless, hungry, marginalized, victims of abuse and the orphaned in our communities, remembering that Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:42-43 states, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

May this be so, in the name and examples of Christ, Amen.