



WCC Living Letters to the Pacific Churches

Fiji, 27-29 May 2010

REPORT



World Council
of Churches





REPORT

WCC Living Letters to the Pacific Churches

Fiji, 27-29 May 2010

**"The Peoples of the Pacific need our prayers
and a valiant world pronouncement on climate change.
And they need them now!"**

Introduction	2.
Living Letters Visit to Church and Civilian Authorities in Suva	4.
Living Letters Visit to Viwa Island	8.
Conclusion	12.

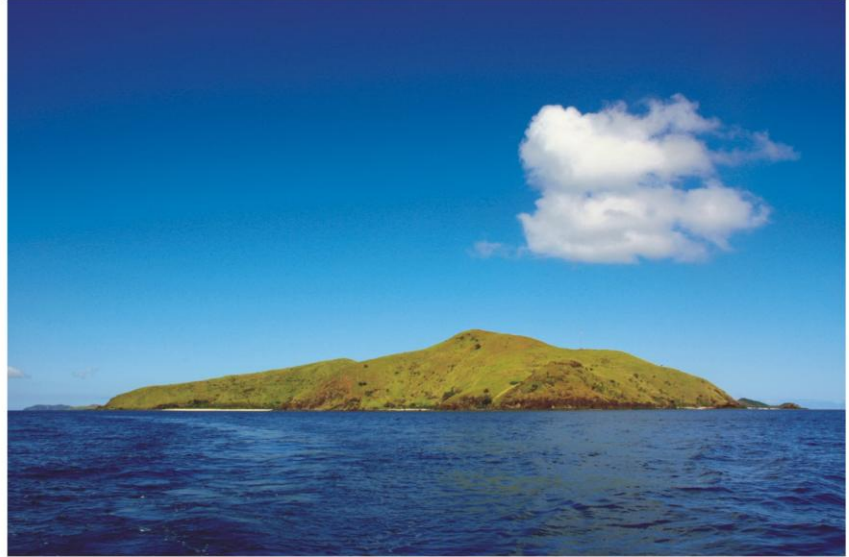


Living Letters Ecumenical team visits

Living Letters are small ecumenical teams visiting a country to listen, learn, share approaches and challenges in overcoming violence and in peace making, and to pray together for peace in the community and in the world. A team consists of 4 - 6 women and men from around the world who have witnessed violence in its various forms and are engaged in working for just peace. A Living Letters team will be successful when those visited can affirm "we are not alone!" - and when team members feel they have received much from those who they visited to encourage.

"You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

(2 Corinthians 3:3, RSV)



Introduction

The members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) "Living Letters" Team visited the Fiji Islands in the South Pacific, in a mission of Christian love, fraternal accompaniment and solidarity, in close relation to the catastrophic consequences of the impact of climate change that are already being observed in the region.

The "Living Letters" Team visited the Pacific Churches and their faithful, to share with them the WCC's deep concern and our own concern and prayers, as well as to make it clear we are at a critical crossroad.

The peoples of the Pacific who have contributed least to the global threat of climate change, are already suffering it and will suffer it most. Once more we repeat that it is a sin against God and against His good creation, our natural world, where we all live in and from where we obtain our sustenance.

Our initial visit was directed to Tuvalu and to the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu). However due to totally unforeseen circumstances this visit could not take place and with the assistance of the Pacific Council of Churches a new programme was prepared. It included a number of visits in Suva, the capital of Fiji, which were followed by a two day visit to the Island of Viwa, 15 minutes off the shore of the mainland island of Viti Levu (Great Fiji), the largest and most populated of Fiji's 333 islands. We were informed that Fiji is the only country in the Pacific with Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities living together. The other Pacific countries are exclusively Christian.



International Ecumenical Peace Convocation

Kingston | Jamaica | 2011

Living Letters - from the Decade Churches in Solidarity with Women to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

The Living Letters have a history within the World Council of Churches: during the Decade "Churches in Solidarity with Women" 1988 - 1998, some 75 teams visited more than 650 communities. Within the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) the Living Letters provide an opportunity for many people to have safe encounters in local contexts around the issues related to violence prevention, peace making, justice and nonviolence. These encounters will provide substance to the consultative process leading up to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) and the Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace. Several team visits will take place each year from 2008 to 2010.

“Living Letters” Visit to Church and Civilian Authorities in Suva

After the arrival of the “Living Letters” team in Nadi, it performed a short visit to Nabila Village, being received by its Chief. The team members were taken to the shoreline where they observed its erosion and how it has been receding for the last decade, how uprooted trees lay down on the coastline, and how dwellers are worried by this climate change associated phenomenon. They have a simpler but sustainable lifestyle living in dignity according to their traditions and culture. They have a deep contact with nature and their deep faith in God is an example to us all. The following morning and before initiating our visit to Suva we received Fe’iloakitau Kaho Tevi, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), and the Venerable Archdeacon John Teana, Anglican Church in Fiji, Diocese of Polynesia. Both of them joined the team and accompanied us during all our visits in Suva, while Fr. Jonh Teana also accompanied in Viwa. In our way to Suva, we stopped at the “Khrist Jyoti” (Christ the Light) Roman Catholic Ashram where we were received by Father Michael (New Zealand) and Father Lewis (India). We admired the wonderful location of the Ashram where courses are given being also used as a retreat centre. We visited its chapel and were inspired by the natural surroundings and the immensity of the ocean and its coral barrier. The retreat centre was founded by Sister Canisius (New Zealand) in 1982. Our next stop was Sygatoka town. Visiting the market we admired the abundant produce



Photo: Visit in the “Khrist Jyoti” (Christ the Light) Roman Catholic Ashram



coming from the villages located upstream Sygatoka River. Talking to locals they were well informed on the effects of climate change, and told us the villagers could give us additional details of climatic changes they keep witnessing. The weather, once stable and predictable, has become totally unpredictable, with stronger rains, dry weather, stronger winds, and greater cyclone intensities. We observed that of the two bridges crossing the Sygatoka River, one had been partially destroyed by the over-flooded river that inundated Sygatoka town during cyclone Thomas in March 2010.

Once in Suva we visited the headquarters of the Methodist Church of Fiji and its General Secretary, Rev. Laisiasa Ratabacaca, who received us on behalf of President Rev. Ame Tugawe. After the welcome ceremony and the blessing, we talked on the purpose of our visit to the Pacific Churches, centred on climate change and what the Churches and the WCC are doing from the ethical and advocacy points of view to assist and accompany its potential victims. We were also introduced to all the members of the Staff sharing and exchanging information. The next visit was performed to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. The PIFS was founded in 1971 and comprises sixteen independent and self-governing states. We were received by its Deputy General Secretary (Strategic Partnership & Coordination Programme), Feleti P. Teo, and by Ms. Coral Pasisi. They were present at COP15 Copenhagen but were greatly disappointed by its outcome. Climate change and the PIFS's and the WCC's long involvement in the international negotiations were discussed. In particular the issue of population resettlement was analysed, and although both organisations coincide on several basic principles, PIFS is centred on the legal aspects of territorial disappearance and the legal status of migrants while the WCC is focused on the ethical and humane approach of populations forced to migrate to other countries of the region due to a sea level rise they were not responsible for. During lunchtime at the outskirts of Suva the

Photos: Visit the headquarters of the Methodist Church of Fiji and its General Secretary, Rev. Laisiasa Ratabacaca, Suva.



Cries and hopes from the Pacific

Atua (God)! Your Pacific people call out to you,
even as the waters continue to rise...

hear our prayer, we who trust in your love!

Atua! Your Pacific people call out to you, even
as our land disappears before our eyes...

hear our prayer, we who hope in your love!

Atua! Our strength! Our life! Our love!

As part of the 13 December 2009 church bell-ringing campaign, the members of the Ecumenical Centre Worship Committee prepared a special service which proposed 350 drum beats – fifty beats for each of the seven days of creation. The above prayer was offered during the service by and for the people of the Pacific.

“Living Letters” Team met the members of the Consultation on “Good Governance and Leadership Programme” organised and conducted by the PCC, with whom there was an exchange of perspectives and future collaboration on the issue of climate change. The final visit in Suva took place at the Ministry of Local Government. We were received by the Minister for Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment, Mr. Samuela A. Saumatua, and one of his assistants. The Minister had attended COP15 Copenhagen and expressed his extreme disappointment on the poor results achieved that did not meet the great expectations put on the conference. He declared they do not have a general climate change policy but regional and local plans and policies. There are similarities between the programmes of both the Ministry and the WCC, being them on the same line of thought. A Climate Change Unit was formed at the Ministry in 2009, and they are shaping a ‘Fiji Climate Change Team’ to implement a national policy on climate change, as they are strongly impressed by the gravity of the situation. PCC will be a member of this Team. In relation to forced migration and population resettlement, he declared that in the Kiowa Islands, Fiji, migrants from Kiribati have already been resettled successfully. He declared himself a good Christian and shared with us the idea of promoting a time for Creation in the churches where climate change could be explained and studied. We responded that his idea was more than welcomed, and that the WCC and its member Churches had already adopted a ‘Time for Creation’ starting on 1st September and ending on 4th October of every year. The interview ended with the deep satisfaction of all its participants. After the meeting we proceeded to the departing point where the “Living Letters” and its two companions embarked in the boat that took us to Viwa.

Photos (top): Visit to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, its Deputy General Secretary (Strategic Partnership & Coordination Programme), Feleti P. Teo, and by Ms. Coral Pasisi.

Photos (down): Visit to the Minister for Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment, Mr. Samuela A. Saumatua.



“Living Letters” Visit to Viwa Island

The Village in Viwa Island has around 100 members. It is considered the most significant Christian centre in Fiji, because in Viwa the New Testament was translated from the original Greek text into Fijian language (Bauan dialect), by Rev. John Hunt, a Wesleyan English missionary and scholar. Rev. Hunt was born in England in 1812 and with his family he established himself in Viwa in 1842, where he performed his extraordinary translation work. He slept in Jesus in 1848 at the age of 36, as states the monument close to the islands landing point. When the “Living Letters” Team arrived in a small boat during high-tide, we were totally captivated by the spectacular view of a low hill on top of which a blue-roofed white church (Rev. John Hunt Memorial Church) dominated

the perspective of a green lawn bordered with lovely houses surrounded by abundant green trees and vegetation, descending up to the landing point. Later on we learnt this was the second landing point of the island, being the first one on the northern coast where the first missionaries had arrived in the 19th century. During our visit we were at all times accompanied by Isikeli Komaisavai, the Chairperson of the Viwa Village Committee, who was our Host. And by the Venerable Archdeacon John Teana, from the Anglican Church in Fiji, Diocese of Polynesia, also member of the Pacific Council of Churches. We were received by the representative hierarchy of Viwa at the Main Hall, and Venerable John (Fr. John) made the official presentations according to the protocol, and



we were officially received and welcomed by our Host, Isikeli Komaisavai. Then followed the traditional offering of Kava roots to the Chief of the Village and the Kava Ceremony was conducted in an exceptional way as all the "Living Letters" members were offered the Kava twice. The reception words from the Host and from the Head of the Team followed, ending with a formal blessing.

Afterwards we were accompanied to one of the two homes where the members of the Team were going to spend the night. Once there, we were offered a rich and delicious dinner, prepared by Rosie and several other women of the community with the produce of Viwa: fried and boiled fish, coconuts, breadfruit, taro, cassava, peppers and orange juice. The hosts, Joseva and his wife Rosie are wonderful people, very kind and caring, and their hospitality and Christian love for us were shown in every possible way.

In the very early morning of the following day and after the morning devotional, Steward Browne Ilisoni introduced us to the Chief of the Village, Ratu Joji 'Namosimalua who was leaving Viwa with his family in his way for a visit to the mainland. The dialogue was rich and powerful, and he thanked us for our visit to Viwa; when asked which where his concerns in relation to the impact of climate change he expressed his urgent need of assistance to build a retaining wall to avoid land-slides around the Minister's home on top of a close hill, near the Pacific Theological College Lodge. The land-slides are severe and large numbers of trees slide down into the sea as well. The Chief treasures the idea of transforming Viwa into an ecological retreat, centred on its Christian heritage and its importance for the Fijian people, and based on its bountiful nature, variety of trees, plants, birds, and the incomparable beauty of its hilly soil covered with splendid tropical forests. We have faith his inspired dream will become a reality not far away in the future.

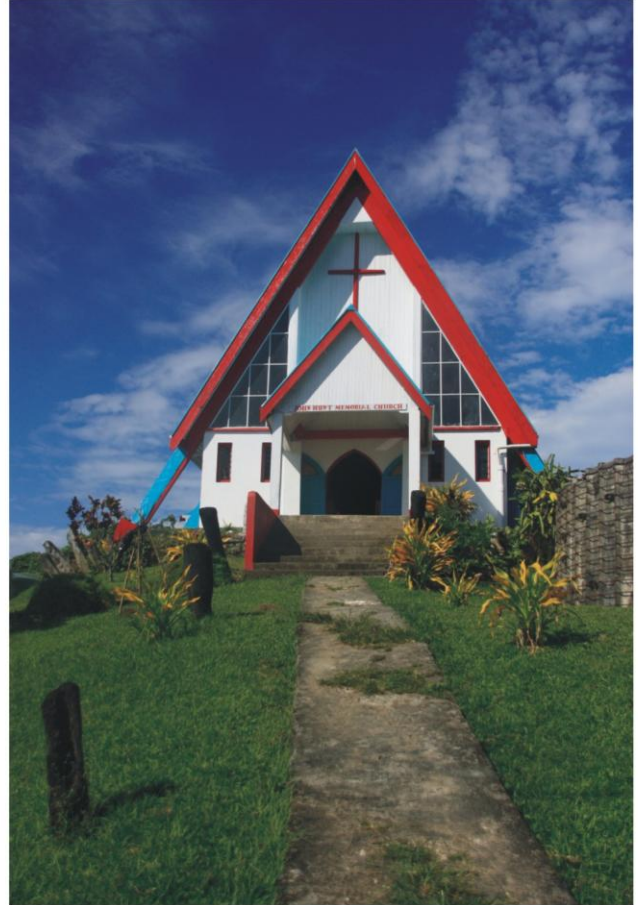
The variety of the products the island offers to its dwellers is immense and covers almost all their needs. Nature is rich and so is what it offers to the inhabitants who have a sustainable life-style, not destroying nature but



Photos (top): The traditional offering of Kava roots to the Chief of the Village and the Kava Ceremony.

Photos (down): Observing the coastal erosion: cracks and holes, land-slides, uprooted trees, and trees growing in incredible positions ready to fall over into the sea.





using it to fulfil their needs and having a surplus which is sold at the marketplace in the mainland.

However, we were informed that Viwa lost four hectares of land since year 2002 due to coastal erosion associated to higher tides and stronger cyclones related to climate change. In March 2010, powerful cyclone “Thomas” caused major damage in homes, infrastructure and vegetation in most of Fijian islands.

During our visit we had the opportunity to talk with a group of students of the Pacific Theological College based in Suva, who were in the island participating in a seminar before their ordination. They were interested in our presence there and were explained in detail our work on climate change.

The following day after the rich breakfast prepared by the women at Rosie’s home, we were taken around the island in the boat, in order to observe the coastal erosion: we observed cracks and holes, land-slides, uprooted trees, and trees growing in incredible positions ready to fall over into the sea. Parts of the coast of Viwa were covered with mangroves which called our attention. We also went close to the first landing point where the first missionaries had arrived, and which became our departing point from Viwa, later in the afternoon.

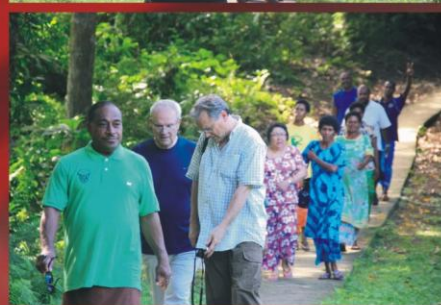
Once again in the Village, we visited and prayed at the Rev. John Hunt Memorial Church (Methodist Church of Fiji), and also visited his tomb located behind the temple. From there and always accompanied and guided by our Host Isilkeli Komaisavai and Venerable John Teana, we crossed the incredible and extraordinary tropical forest –that looked like an unspoiled natural botanical garden- and were taken to the top of the hill Rev. Hunt used as his Prayer Site. We prayed there and thought of God and His immense grace in offering human being the beauty and the perfect equilibrium of His creation.

In our way back we visited the Talatala's (Minister's) home, Rev. Fotofili. We were offered water and rested for some minutes, observing the important land-slides very close to his home that sweep away everything in their path.

Once at Joseva's home, we had a farewell lunch, and we had a very moving departure ceremony with presence of our Hosts, the Talatala, members of the community and all the men and women who had been so good and friendly with us during our visit. Presents were distributed, prayers and blessings were offered, and with tears in our eyes we left what had been our homes and families in Viwa. We crossed the island in our way to the first landing-point where we arrived while the tide was still low. Low tide leaves a wide sandy beach that forced us to go barefoot a long way until we reached the boat that took us back to the mainland.

Our new friends in Viwa accompanied us to the boat singing a farewell song and while it slowly moved away they and we kept waving our hands exclaiming:

Thank you very much!
Good bye!
Vinaka Vakalevu!
Mode!





Conclusion

We conclude our Report requesting all of you to respond to the Pacific Peoples pledge, to recognise they rely on us as human beings but also as faithful members of our Churches around the world.

Their extraordinary resilience and their profound faith in the Almighty God evidenced by their conduct and their deep involvement in the life of their churches is a sign of hope for the future whatever the solutions might be.

We must continue praying for them but at the same time we must never surrender in our efforts and in our national and international advocacy to call the attention of policy makers in order to take the urgently needed measures to stop polluting the earth's atmosphere, God's good creation, enabling the inhabitants of the only world we have and in which we all live, to cope with climate change.

We are only asking for justice, equity, solidarity and dignity as a priority, without implementing new delays and strategies to avoid ethical and moral duties.

May the Grace, the Peace, and the Love of the Lord be with you today, tomorrow and always!

Yours in Christ,
"Living Letters" Team

Nadi
Suva
Viwa, Fiji.

27th to 29th May 2010

EDITORIAL & THANKS

The “Living Letters” Team visit to the Pacific Churches was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in collaboration with the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC). The team was composed by:

Bishop Sofie Petersen,

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, Diocese of Greenland

Elias Crisostomo Abramides,

Ecumenical Patriarchate, Argentina, member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change

Arthur Shoo,

Director, Empowerment and Capacity Building, All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Nikos Kosmidis,

Church of Greece, and member of Echos - Commission on youth in the ecumenical movement (WCC)

The team was accompanied by:

Venerable Archdeacon John Teana,
Anglican Church in Fiji, Diocese of Polynesia

Mark Beach,
Director of Communication - WCC

We thank the presence and participation of leaders from the Pacific Churches:

Rev. Tofiga Falani,

President of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu)

Rev. Soama Tafia,

Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu)

Fe'iloakitau Kaho Tevi,

General Secretary – Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)

We thank the organizational leadership of the WCC Staff:

Guillermo Kerber Mas,
Programme Executive Climate change - WCC

Patricia Bruschweiler,
Project Assistant Climate Change – WCC

Texts: Elias Crisostomo Abramides
Editing: Fiji Living Letters delegation
Photos: © Nikos Kosmidis
Design and layout: Nikos Kosmidis





World Council of Churches

Postal address:
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Visiting address:
150 Route de Ferney
Grand-Saconnex (Geneva)
Switzerland

Tel: (+41 22) 791 6111
Fax: (+41 22) 791 0361

Visit the WCC online at oikoumene.org