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Anglican Women at Prayer: Weaving Our Bonds of Affection

By Revd Dr Eleanor Sanderson

The Women's Studies Centre joined with a range of organisations within the Anglican Communion to support a conference at the Centre for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological

given by the Women's Studies Centre enabled me to travel to the USA and to take up the invitation to be the "weaver" for this event. The genesis of this conference came from a vowed order of An-



Sharing together in worship at the conference

Seminary which focused on the significance of prayer in the lives of women around our Anglican Communion. This conference was called, "Anglican Women at Prayer, Weaving our Bonds of Affection" and was held in March of this year. Part of the support

given by the Women's Studies Centre enabled me to travel to the USA and to take up the invitation to be the "weaver" for this event. The genesis of this conference came from a vowed order of Anglican women, based in the USA, who are the Companions of the Holy Cross. The Companions, which include both lay and ordained women, make vows of intercessory prayer and a commitment to social justice and simplicity of life. From the vision

statement for this conference, they write:

Imagine – Anglican women from across the world, bound by an abiding love for Jesus, sharing personal stories, deepest hopes, dreams and personal prayers. Imagine the diversity of Anglican women from across the world, praying with dance and music, through art and poetry, and in silence. Women gathered listening to one another and to God. Imagine – Anglican women from across the world, forever bound in an international community of mutually supportive prayers.



In our context here in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, we live in the midst of an expression of church which has the potential to live within and exhibit such an illustration of unity of love and diversity of humanity. The imagery of weaving is so pertinent here in our islands. To speak with the language of weaving is to speak of deeply sacred and community practices that have long been part of the traditions of women in our lands. My own speaking within the conference was a weaving



of my own voice and experience with that of many other women with whom I have journeyed in research projects both here in our context and in Africa and I share some extracts from those addresses here:

“In my Pacific culture I would say, we come to sit on the woven mat, to share the stories of that mat. In the words of Grace, a Tongan sister: Weaving has been how our mothers and our fore-mothers have taught us. It has been taught to us from one generation to another and that’s how [we look for our way of teaching and sharing]...The mat is where we sit down with our stories. And every weave represents a time of something in our lives.”

The main address which I gave, took its inspiration from both the Maori understanding of Te Aho Tapu, the sacred thread, which is within all weaving and the Celtic Christian understanding of our world being an ongoing creative interweaving between Christ and creation. I spoke about our lives as women of prayer being lives which mirror our great weaver God; choosing to accept and live within the encounter of an earthly rootedness and participating in a creativity that facilitates the life-giving practice of spiritual community, which is not divorced from such earthly realities.



“Weaving connects us to the reality of a land, the reality of our boundedness to creation. Weaving refutes disembodied knowledge or thought and emphasises our belonging to the reality of this earth in all its pain and joy. I have been reflecting that the prayers of women in our churches are often like our weavings: undergirding the fabric of community yet often doing so invisibly. From the very first step that I took towards the church, I have always been given women who pray with me. One of the consistent

parts of my own story is that there are women a little older and wiser than myself who seem to be gifted to me to partner with me in prayer, women younger than me for whom I am called to pray and women who share the same life-stages with whom I have become joined in a fellowship of prayer. My growth, my life in the church, can be marked by a progression of hands that have been held together in prayer, one after another as I have travelled in my journey with God. Through such hands the affection of God has been communicated to me. Women's gathering in small groups, in twos and threes, to pray for each other, to pray for the church, to pray for the world has been one of the most consistent expressions of my experience of the church. These integral threads within the churches have often been invisible. They grow spontaneously from women's fellowship, aren't often in the programmes of churches and in my experience haven't been restricted to church denominations. There is an invisibility and marginality to these networks of prayers, but that invisibility does not mean that they are insignificant."

The sacred thread which weaves our bonds of affection is the love of God – which is very simple to say and not very simple to live. The women in our Three Tikanga Church know that very well.

The morning that I arrived at the Centre for Anglican Communion Studies, they had just received an e-mail from a woman in Melanesia who wrote: "Glory be to God! What great wonderful news to hear. I am so happy for this Conference and my whole heart seeks the divine glory of God to be with each and every one. I am an Anglican Mother, it has been my wish to see all the Anglican women coming together praying together for the whole Anglican Church throughout the world, for our Children and for the whole world."

I know that we can sometimes question the difference that expressions of our spirituality and faith can have in the church

or the world. Yet, through my interaction in preparing for and speaking to the conference, I was filled with the overwhelming sense that the prayers of millions of women around the world have a very particular place in the divine heart. I also believe

that it is important to name the reality that for many of our Anglican sisters their lives of prayer may be akin to the offering given by the widow in the temple, who gives just two coins, which is all that she has in her purse. The metaphorical coins of love and prayer may be the reality of the resources which are in the purses of many of our sisters. As Christ points to the act of the widow and asks his disciples to learn

from it, so I believe Christ invites us to learn from the offering of prayer and love in the lives of our sisters from around the world.

God consistently chooses the little things, little acts of love inspired by God, to change the world. God consistently chooses those who are marginal in society to bring about transformation. When you pray with intercession or thanksgiving, your voices join with millions of women from around the globe and you are participating in a weaving so incredible, so beautiful it is beyond our comprehension. Even if what you have woven is trod upon in ways it was not intended, even if it remains somewhat invisible. Know this: all of us are invited by God to enter



Ellie with Phoebe Griswold, the leader of the Anglican Women at Prayer Committee



the Holy of Holy's through our prayers, to participate in a sacred conversation that will never end. Because to pray is to love. To pray is to love.

I left inspired by the commitment of the Companions of the Holy Cross to take vows of intercession, simplicity of life and social justice. I was also reaffirmed in my perception that transformation with our Creating Redeeming and Life-Giving God begins with God's creativity within ourselves and our relationships. To share lives of prayer with our sisters, and with our brothers, and to share those lives deeply, needs nothing more than our own hospitality to initiate or to respond. The gifts of weaving in our context are often gifts which facilitate hospitality. The sacred thread within those weavings, if we perceive it as

divine life-giving love, is an expression of the greatest offering of hospitality of all. We have a wonderful opportunity here in our Three Tikanga church to experience and practice that divine hospitality and to journey together as women of prayer in the creative interweaving of our bonds of affection.

Live recordings of the conference can be found at <http://www.vts.edu/awapvideos>. The Anglican Theological Review will be dedicating a special issue in response to the conference.

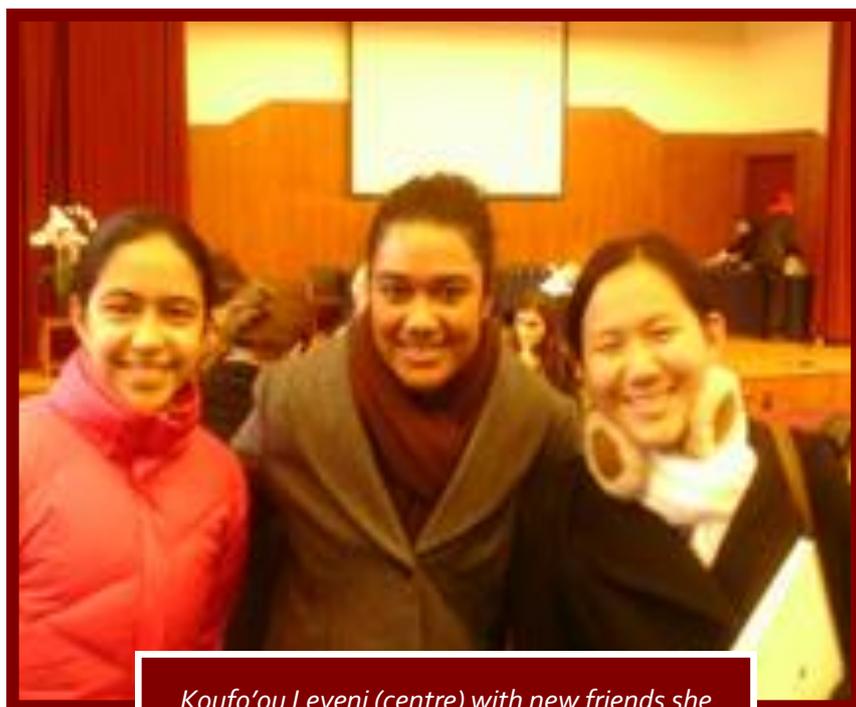
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Photos supplied*



UNCSW 58: Challenges & Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women & Girls

By Kaufo'ou Leveni & Ana Maria Lamositele

Each year this Province is invited to send a delegate to the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. For the 58th Session of this Commission, we were asked to send a young women along with a chaperone. Kaufo'ou Leveni from the Archdeaconry of Tonga was selected to be our Provinces official delegate and Ana Maria Lamositele from the Archdeaconry of Samoa as her chaperone. They braved the cold New York winter to bring you this edited report which was submitted by Kaufo'ou on her return, assisted by Ana Maria.



Koufo'ou Leveni (centre) with new friends she met at the teen programme.

First all of all, we would like to take this opportunity to praise and thank our heavenly Father for his protection and guidance upon us as we traveled to New York to attend and represent the Aotearoa and Polynesian Province from the Anglican community in the UNCSW58th session. Secondly, we would like

to thank the

General Secretary Michael Hughes, Archdeacon Tuatagaloa Taimalelagi and Archdeacon Joe Leota for nominating us as the

delegate and chaperone to take part in this once in a life time experience. This opportunity has truly broaden our understanding in social and economic global issues relating to women and young girls. We also like to thank Rachael Chardon and Beth Adamson for their never ending concerns in ensuring that we are well and on track with our sessions. Once again thank you for trusting us and allowing us to experience this global annual event hosted by the United Nations and our Ecumenical Women's group.

Orientation Process – first weekend in New York:

The orientation process provided us with an insight to what is expected during the UNCSW meetings, this process also gave us the opportunity to meet and greet our Anglican sisters or aunties who travelled from all over the world to attend this annual event. At first we thought that it was only us the Anglican community that took part in this event, not realizing until the Ecumenical Women's Orientation we discovered that there were other faith based organizations and other Non-Governmental organizations from around the world involved that connected to form this group to express women and young girls issues relating to the challenges and achievements of the MDGs. We were overwhelmed to discover that there were so many sessions, parallel and side events happening all at the same time and it was a matter of choosing relevant areas of discussion that we would like to attend, something that we can relate to back in our own countries and communities.

Benefits of having a chaperone and I am thankful for selecting a young Pacific Island woman to accompany me during this trip:

Kaufo'ou and Ana having breakfast at the hotel—already wrapped up warmly



This trip has broadened my understanding in various issues relating to young women and girls from all around the world that I never knew existed. During various discussions there were some issues and terminology that I did not understand and was new to my knowledge, having Ms Ana with me as the chaperone she was able to explain and provide examples from a Pacific point of view that made it easy for me to understand



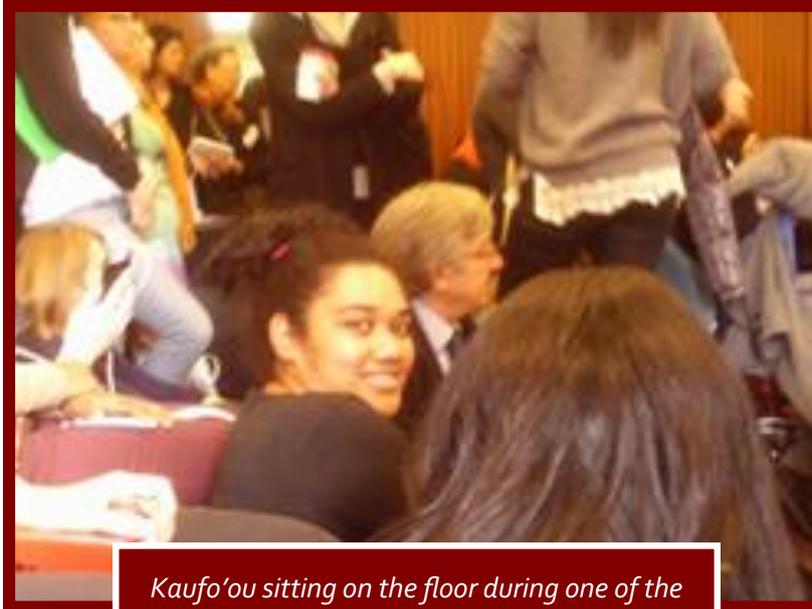
Some of the representatives after the service.

the content of the discussions. Over the past two weeks we became very close and developed a sisterhood relationship, not only that she was able to be my mentor but we were also able to have fun together, laugh and share ideas on various discussions that took place during the meeting. Thank you once again for selecting Ms Ana as my chaperone she was a great help to me.

Experience and Lessons Learnt:

1. "The working group on girls" is a programme organized by young teenage girls that attended last year's UNCSW session. One of their resolutions and lessons learnt during their involvement is the need for younger girls to get involved, to talk with other peers on the MDGs and hear their concerns and issues and most importantly developing their own resolutions to implement back in their own countries to support the MDGs.
2. Attending the Teenage programme orientation and a couple of their activities has provided an opportunity for teenage girls around the world to come together to share their thoughts and what they have done in their communities to improve and support the eight MDGs. I have learnt that there is a big difference between the South Pacific Islanders and the European countries. We (Pacific Islanders) never experienced hunger but

rather hardship, for example, our island families own a piece of land in which they use to grow crops for personal consumption or for selling at the market to earn money. I have learnt that in some countries where children are living in poverty and are uneducated they are put in vulnerable positions such as forced to early marriage, sex slaves and prostitution to try and earn some money. This is a very serious issue and we (our province) should consider and look out for to ensure that our children are not placed in this position in the near future.



Kafo'ou sitting on the floor during one of the parallel meetings—full house.

3. Having young girls like myself talk about these issues empowers us to do good and to help other sisters so they do not go through this terrible experience. Most of us girls are striving to succeed our goals so that we could get an education and be employed to help our families. I think sharing our ideas and experience in each country is really helpful to improve the next generation's understanding of these issues.
4. I learned that forced and early marriage is one of the biggest problems the world faces. Not only is a young girl forced to marry every two seconds but the results are devastating. While getting rid of child marriage is just one of the Millennium Development Goals, achieving it would solve many others. When a girl is forced to get married, her right to education is taken away from her, which causes a lot of problems for her in all aspects of humanity. If she gets pregnant at this early stage, her body is not mature enough to bear a child, she can face many complications during her pregnancy and birth, some of which are fatal. Child marriage is devastating physically, emotionally, and economically. It sets the world on a continuous cycle of poverty, and leaves victims to it with little to no potential for self-sustainability and happiness. This issue is not known by everyone in our province/country but we need to educate our younger generations on these issues for the betterment of themselves and our societies.
5. I also learnt about the absence of girls in the fields of Science Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Throughout the world, there is a large gender gap in science and

technology fields. I personally think that this is an important issue for all the young girls to fulfill and take part in the science and technology evolution in the future. Our province mainly the Pacific island countries should encourage our young girls to consider science and technology at an early

stage as a path career, this will give them the equal opportunity with boys to strive and work together for the betterment of their communities.

6. I discovered while attending the UNCSW meeting that prostitution is a major problem in the global environment where exchange of money and young girls is done to satisfy needs of other human beings. Trafficking and Prostitution of young

girls is a serious issue that all coun-

tries in our province should take a stand to educate our parents, youth, young children who are vulnerable in these circumstances. I have also learnt that the internet is another way of marketing young girls into this sex industry. I totally do not want this to happen to young girls of our provinces therefore it is important to educate parents through the church, so that they are aware of what their children are accessing on the internet. One of the speakers that spoke during the session "Impacts of technology with girls" is that girls are more likely to give their passwords and user names to their friends, which put girls in a position that is easy for the offender to reach and make contact with her. This is a very important issue that young girls like myself should be educated not to trust and give people that you do not know personal information as it may be the opportunity for girls to be involved in sex trafficking on the internet. Furthermore, educating boys that paying for sex is abusing women and their own sisters, our church community should have programmes to support people that have been involved in sex trafficking. Another important issue that I would like to raise is for our people to take a stand and report cases that involve young girls in sex trafficking in our church communities.

7. HIV is another alarming issue involving young girls around the world even though it may be a small percentage of people in the Pacific affected by HIV we must advocate and continue to educate both boys and girls at a young age on

this issue. I believe that the church should stand strong and encourage young generation that sex should only be allowed when married, furthermore it is important to connect with non-government organizations that are advocating on these issues to support them so that our young people are knowledgeable on HIV issues.

Concluding comments:

I would like to conclude; that our youth in the Pacific should come together and discuss the MDG's amongst them so that most teenagers would know what is happening in their environment and the world. Furthermore with the theme of next years UNCSW59th sessions based on the Review of the Beijing Platform, instead of attending the actual meeting in New York our church can maybe consider hosting a similar event to discuss the issues and to get our youth involved in decisions making for the betterment of our communities.

- ✓ Youth within our province should arrange a forum to talk about the importance of involving themselves in these types of forums to build their self-esteem and knowledge on global issues affecting young women, children and boys. Having this opportunity for young people will devel-



Morning praise and worship with women from around the world and their flags

op their character to become leaders in our church and communities. This coordination can be supported by each youth coordinator in each country to assist in making this possible and for giving the opportunity for the young people to be heard.

- ✓ I also note the importance of young people participating and volunteering in the centers of Violence against women and children, Family planning, hospital care or any other area where we can help our community improve in the future.

✓ Parents should know the importance of their advice/ words of wisdom to assist their children with their decisions and choices in life.

✓ In addition the opportunity of scholarships given by the church should be strengthen so there is a

gender balance amongst both boys

and girls that apply for scholarships. Furthermore the church should ensure that the process of applying for a scholarship is a done in a friendly matter and easy to understand for the young people to apply and utilize this opportunity to build their careers.

Thank you once again and God bless.

Photos Supplied

The Anglican Women's Studies Centre present the
2014 Women in Ministry Provincial Hui
“Church, Women & Leading?”

For Lay & Ordained Anglican Women in Ministry

St John's Theological College, Auckland, New Zealand

Monday, 29th September—Wednesday, 1st October 2014

Mark in your diaries now—More details to follow

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: The Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general the WSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.