

Te Pouhere Sunday

St. Paul's, Milford

7 June 2015: 8.00 and 9.30

Introduction

Today the Church in New Zealand and in parts of the South Pacific observes Te Pouhere (*Pou-here*) or Constitution Sunday. Nowhere else in the world is this celebrated. It's a unique celebration for our church. It acknowledges and celebrates and rejoices in something very distinctive in our life. I'm sure you will all know that although there continues to be one Anglican Church in our country, much of its life and work is carried out in different ways within our three cultural streams – or *tikanga*. All this came about after years and years of discussion. In 1992 it led to the revision of our Church's constitution. I'll say more about that later.

The word Constitution is a very legal word. Nothing wrong with that – it represents order and justice and freedom and equality under the law, a basis for our life as a community and an ordered society. But the Maori word that's used for today offers a different dimension. *Te Pou-here* is not a direct translation. Maori is a very poetic language, it uses metaphor, picture language. The word *pou* means an upright post or support, a pole to which a canoe or *waka* might be tied. The word *here* means a line or a leash or a mooring that's tied to the post. *Pou-here*, then, the post or pole to which is attached the line. That which gives sanctuary, or safety, or stability. The building in Wellington in which I worked for several years with the Anglican Board of Missions was named *Te Herenga Waka*, the place where the canoes were tied up. We might translate that today as a mooring or a marina. The two terms *Te Pou-here* and *Te Herenga Waka* are closely related and convey much the same idea. So much for that. There is in this community a marina. It's one of my favourite places here. And it's interesting that this place, *Milford*, probably takes its name from a place in Wales (I nearly said England!) called *Milford Haven*. That word *haven* is exactly the sort of word I would use to describe *Te Pou-here* or *Te Herenga Waka*.

The other thing I wanted to say is that as far as the hymns today are concerned I haven't completely taken leave of my senses although the evidence might suggest otherwise! I realise we are singing *a hymn*/two hymns usually associated with Christmas. We do this to acknowledge that we who live under the Southern Cross follow a radically different seasonal pattern to those in the North. For us Christmas is summer not winter. Ours is 'an upside-down

Christmas'. And that is typical of the adjustment our forebears in the church had to make. It's only fairly recently that we have acknowledged that the pohutukawa is an important part of our Christmas backdrop. Christmas then not only the holly and the ivy and the fir trees of Europe. The picture above the altar here at St Paul's depicts the Marsden Cross in the Bay of Islands, located on an incredibly beautiful beach on which the pohutukawa thrives. Last Christmas some of us had the joy of celebrating the 200th anniversary of the preaching of the Gospel on these shores. It also marked the beginning of European settlement. The origins of our Church are thus intertwined with the birth of our nation.

Te Pouhere then gives us an opportunity to recognise these things about our life as a church.

Questions and Answers in place of the Sermon

I'm going to put this sermon in a question and answer form. Some of you, most of you, perhaps all of you will know the answers already, and that's good. For some of us, on the other hand, (myself included) this might be useful revision.

Question 1

So, we're observing Te Pouhere (Constitution) Sunday: what does that mean? What is this Constitution anyway?

This is the Constitution (Te Pouhere) of the Anglican Church here, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. In 1992 the church's Constitution, drawn up in 1857, was revised. In 1857 the Anglican Church here became an autonomous church, known as the NZ branch of the United Church of England and Ireland. That constitution was a very revolutionary one because for the first time anywhere in the Anglican Communion, lay people sat alongside bishops and clergy in the synods of the church. It would be many years after that they were given the same status in the Church of England. The 1992 Constitution of this Church expanded the constitution to provide for three partners to order their affairs within their own cultural context.

Question 2

Who are these three partners?

Under the 1992 Constitution the partners to the Constitution are the three Tikanga which make up our church: Tikanga Pakeha, Tikanga Maori, and Tikanga Pasefika.

Question 3

What's a Tikanga?

The word tikanga (with a small 't') means 'custom, way, style, or cultural model', but when it's used in a specifically Anglican context it's written with a

capital T and means one of the three strands that together make up the Anglican church in this part of the world. Here, Tikanga Pakeha is made up of seven Dioceses, Tikanga Maori comprises five Hui Amorangi (regional bishoprics, the boundaries of which differ from those of the dioceses). Tikanga Pasefika encompasses Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands, and is known as the Diocese of Polynesia. One of the bishops of the Diocese of Polynesia cares for the Pasefika people here.

Question 4

So is it three churches, or one church?

That sounds a little like the question that's often asked about the Trinity – do we worship one God or three? And the answer is kind of the same: it's about community which encompasses the distinctive character of its members. The Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia is one church, in which each Tikanga is an equal partner in the decision-making process of the General Synod. Each exercises mission and ministry to God's people within the culture of each partner. There are some things we do together (General Synod and a number of cross-Tikanga bodies, including the Anglican Missions Board) and many things we do separately. Many Anglicans live out their church life within only their own Tikanga – I guess most of us at St Paul's are like that: we do things within Tikanga Pakeha, and especially within our Diocese of Auckland. And it's probably worth noting that which Tikanga you're part of isn't based on race: I know of Maori working within Tikanga Pakeha (like the Vicar of Grey Lynn), and Pakeha working within Tikanga Maori, and similarly with Tikanga Pasefika. It's about where you find your home.

Question 5

And don't we have three Archbishops?

That's right – in this Province we have three 'co-presiding bishops' who are addressed as 'Archbishop': Brown Turei for Tikanga Maori, Philip Richardson for 'the New Zealand dioceses' (as Tikanga Pakeha is sometimes referred to) and Winston Halapua in Polynesia. They work very closely together and have a real leadership role in this Province.

Question 5

But the Anglican Church was English to begin with, right?

At first the church here in NZ was a Maori church. It was a missionary church, *Te Hahi Mihinare*. It began in 1814 when the Maori chief Ruatara agreed with the Reverend Samuel Marsden to give protection to three missionaries and their families at Oihi in the Bay of Islands. Missionary activity, including Christian teaching in the Maori language, and by Maori themselves, quickly spread throughout the country. This was guided by the Church Missionary Society under the leadership of the Rev. Henry Williams from 1823. The earliest

Synods of the diocese of Waiapu (the eastern part of the North Island) were conducted in Maori, under Bishop William Williams.

When organised European settlement began after 1840, mainly from England and Scotland, a new focus of the church emerged; the formation of the church in the new colonial settlements. George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, arrived in 1842 as a bishop of the United Church of England and Ireland. The settlers were keen to establish their familiar church in a new land, but without the English connection with the state.

However, by the 1840s European settlement began and before long Pakeha outnumbered Maori. What became the settler church soon out-numbered the Maori church, Te Hahi Mihinare. The Church eventually began to look like a pale imitation of the English church with a few Maori pastorates on the side. The wars of the 1860s especially in Waikato and Taranaki decimated the Maori Church. People left, small Maori sects emerged, and the work of the church was set back by about 50 years. It was only in 1928 that the first Maori bishop was consecrated, but he was a bishop with limited powers. He could only enter a diocese to minister to his people with the permission of the diocesan bishop. So the history of the Anglican Church here has been the history of the Maori church of the missionaries (including many Maori missionaries) and the settler church. Since European settlement, there have always been these two strands – but for a while there was only the Maori strand.

Question 6

And the church in the Pacific – how did that happen?

From the time of Bishop Selwyn the islands of the South Pacific had been included in the Church of the Province of New Zealand. The Anglican Church in Melanesia became a separate province in 1975. The Anglican Church in the islands of Polynesia (mainly Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa) was established as an associated missionary diocese in 1925. In 1990 the Diocese of Polynesia became a diocese in its own right. It has archdeaconries, just as our diocese does – in fact one of the archdeaconries is located in Auckland, for ministry by and amongst Polynesians there. So what are now the three Tikanga have a long history together. And this is something worth celebrating.

Question 7

So is everyone celebrating this Constitution Sunday today?

General Synod set down Te Pouhere (Constitution) Sunday in the Lectionary and the Church Calendar for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost. It's one of a number of 'special Sundays' that the Calendar offers us – Sea Sunday is another.

Question 8

So in practice, what does the three Tikanga church mean for us here at St Paul's? Does it mean using lots of Maori language in services, even though we are largely a Pakeha congregation?

Well, the liturgies in our Prayer Book include some parts in Maori or *te reo*, and we use some of these phrases here, though not as much as some other Pakeha churches. The service we use today at 9.30 is one that puts the English and Maori versions together, side by side. Using some of the Maori is a way of recognising our membership, our unity with the larger Anglican church here that we're a part of. We do the same sort of thing in other respects. Bishop Ross isn't here with us every Sunday, but all the time we have the Bishop's Chair in the sanctuary. It reminds us that we are members of a larger body, the Diocese. We don't just put the Bishop's chair there when we know he is coming to sit on it – it is there all the time. Hearing some Maori words – like seeing the Bishop's chair – reminds us that we're Anglicans in this country, that we are part of a larger community. And all who are trained to be Anglican clergy today have to be able to take a service in Maori.

Question 9

What else does it mean for us here?

Being part of a church that recognises a diversity of ways of being helps link us to the world outside the church. New Zealand is much more a multicultural society than it was when my family settled here in the 1860s and 1870s and even when I went to school in the 1940s and 1950, and even when I trained at St John's College in the 1960s. So it's good for the church to reflect this, and to do so in a way that honours our history, that honours where we have all come from, and the things that have happened in this land.

And to structure our church like this is very 'Anglican'. The Anglican Communion is a world-wide family of Christians who affirm an expression of the Christian faith in the local circumstances of the nations in which they live. Allowing for local differences is one of the key Anglican principles, one that goes all the way back to the very beginnings of the Anglican Church. And our Three Tikanga Constitution allows us to say something about community. Real community is about relationship, it's about talking together and getting to know each other. It's about trust and mutual respect.

To be honest we don't really see parish life operating in a three-tikanga sort of way. Our worship and parish life continues much as it always has. The same is true at diocesan level. Perhaps the most obvious examples of the new way are to be found at the General Synod which meets only every 2 years and in the life of St John's College where the three tikanga rub shoulders together and learn from each other. The staff includes lecturers from all three tikanga.

Question 10

What of the future?

The constitution has been in operation for only 20 years or so. But of course there is a generation or two of clergy who have known nothing other than working in this environment. I have the feeling that within the Church there is a more relaxed atmosphere, a greater feeling of trust, among the three tikanga. But while this has happened another dynamic has taken place. The arrival of many thousands of people from overseas who may be puzzled by this development. And some of them ask: which tikanga do I belong to? Well, chances are that they don't easily identify with Tikanga Maori or Tikanga Pasefika. So does that make them Pakeha? I'm not sure. Tikanga Pakeha, the church of the seven NZ dioceses, has perhaps by default become the gathering place for people of many races and cultures. And I think our church has been strengthened by that. If you visit many Auckland parishes you will discover a significant number are people from many parts of Asia and the Pacific or perhaps Latin America and Africa.

Let me conclude.

Last week we celebrated Trinity Sunday, and the Trinity says to us that at the heart of God there is diversity and there is relationship. Here's something that Henri Nouwen said that I think encapsulates some of the diversity and relationship that we have in our Three Tikanga church.

A mosaic consists of thousands of little stones. Some are blue, some are green, some are yellow, some are gold. When we bring our faces close to the mosaic, we can admire the beauty of each stone. But as we step back from it, we can see that all these little stones reveal to us a beautiful picture, telling a story none of these stones can tell by itself. That is what our life in community is about. Each of us is like a little stone, but together we reveal the face of God to the world. Nobody can say: "I make God visible." But others who see us together can say: "They make God visible." Community is where humility and glory touch.

Noel Derbyshire

This sermon draws on a sermon outline prepared in 2007 by Canon Deborah Broome of the Diocese of Wellington for use on Te Pouhere Sunday. This source is acknowledged with thanks.