

Presbyterian Assembly on the marae

In an historic gathering the Presbyterian Church General Assembly was welcomed onto the marae of the Maori Synod at Ohope. The occasion witnessed the outgoing of the Moderator, the Very Rev. Tame Takao and the incoming of the new Moderator, the Rt Rev Alister Rae of Auckland.

This unique hui at the 84th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand saw 500 people crowded onto the marae, set in a beautiful rural setting surrounded by bush and with the sound of the sea a constant presence.

Commissioners were called onto the marae by Mrs Kitty Temara. The group from the Synod standing in the forecourt of the marae had in their hands fern fronds, a sign of life.

The opening speaker for the tangata whenua was the Rev Ra Koia, Moderator of the Maori Synod. He extended a warm welcome to commissioners.

"A marae is where our tears and our love are brought together in unity and togetherness.

"I feel part of the Assembly. I feel glad that the Assembly is being held here.

"I hope this will be an Assembly where we listen not only with our heads but with our hearts."

A former Moderator of the Synod, the Rev Jim Irwin, (Whakatane) said the gathering was not just an ancient ritual to keep somebody happy it was a deeply religious experience.

There was a presence of belonging to the communion of saints as a living reality. The karanga summoned up the shades of the ancestors.

On the marae Jesus Christ was bidding us welcome.

The meal following the speeches was the final act in the uniting of a fellowship of people — a community who belonged together and were accepted.

"You too will belong here and be no longer a stranger."

Other speeches in welcome were given by the Moderator of the Bay of Plenty Presbytery, the Rev Bill McLeay (Rotorua) and the secretary of the Maori Synod the Rev Makarini Temara.

The first speaker for the visitors, the Rev Duncan Jamieson (Taradale) referred to the travels of the outgoing Moderator, the Very Rev Tame Takao. "We would have hoped that in these journeyings he would have found himself a wife — alas."

The Rev Kenape Faletese, convener



of the Pacific Islanders committee, said "Each time I come here I feel forgiven, healed, united and a son of the Maori people."

Assembly executive secretary the Rev Bill Best, "I feel for me personally that a great many dreams have come true.

"I come back to this marae with joy in my heart.

"You always listen to me, encourage me and send me back refreshed."

Courtesy of Presbyterian Church Assembly News

Accept all peoples says Takao

Not getting married appears to be the main regret of the outgoing Moderator, the Very Rev Tame Takao, after his year in office.

"Some of the programmes referred to my partner — I'm afraid I wasn't able to have that person available.

"I am a very strict theologian and I think someone hasn't taken my rib out yet."

Mr Takao, in a speech which was humorous and moving by turn, stressed the importance of accepting everyone in the church.

He had appreciated that people received him as they were. His theme has been creative change and he was thrilled that in some parishes the theme was in action already.

The Department of Parish Development and Mission had made a terrific impact as had church growth seminars.

Young people were able to come together and work well. In many parishes there was a mixture of races. In worship it was important to recognise these differences.

Some ethnic groups were not mixed with the pakeha — they had differences which were very important to them.

"We need to recognise that we should be working together and see that everyone has a lot to offer in the work of our Lord."

In September Mr Takao travelled to Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. He told the Assembly that in Hong Kong

he was able to have discussions with a church leader who had just travelled to China to discuss the position of the churches in Hong Kong after the colony is returned to China in 1997.

He was given an assurance that the freedom of the churches would continue.

In Taiwan he met Dr C M Kao, recently released from prison on parole. He also met Mrs Ruth Kao who has visited New Zealand.

"The church is growing and has a strong commitment even with the opposition of the Government. There is a strong feeling that the Lord will lead them to the ultimate objective of their concerns."

Dr Kao had been making a lot of converts in prison and perhaps the Government had thought it better to let him out.

In Korea he encountered one Presbyterian church with a membership of 1.5 million which was aiming for 2 million. The Korean churches wanted North and South Korea unified but the Government did not.

There were opposition parties but the church was the only real alternative to the Government.

In New Zealand it was often said that politics had to be kept out of religion but his Asian experience had made it clear that they had to be taken together.

At the end of the speech a group from the Maori Synod joined Mr Takao in a waiata and he received a prolonged standing ovation.