

# National unity in witness – a necessary work

## *United Church structure*

Wider Church unity is sometimes a difficult topic. Most local congregations have connection with a denomination of some kind. This can add strength. These organisations (denominations) stand beside God's Church – each being connected to a sprawling network of individual congregations. They bring (1) accountability, (2) training and (3) support to those churches. Where denominations do this well it can add strength to those congregations.

However, denominations cannot lead in mission. This is because mission is geographically identified. This is therefore where and why united vision and endeavour are necessary. For example, it is not the prerogative of the Baptist or Presbyterian or C3 churches in Tauranga to reach Tauranga for Jesus. It is instead the responsibility of all Christian churches *together* to do that.

We therefore have TWO church structures working together. One is denominational, while the other is the united Church in each location. Like a train running on two railway tracks, God's Church does likewise. The complication is that the denominational track is also 'broken' into many different denominational movements – just as the united Church into many distinct geographically identified groups.

*So, how might we find greater synergy together, to see national vision and strategy enabled and implemented where needed?*

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP TO THE UNITED CHURCH**

Does God raise up servant-leaders to facilitate in his wider united Church, bringing vision and enabling outcomes? Certainly he does and has!

The Book of Judges gives us an example for this. Israel had no king physically on earth – because God was their King. The New Testament Church is the same, with Jesus as our King. The people of Israel were in their separate tribes – just as we who are in God's Church are separated by geography and denomination. But when needed, God was capable of raising up Deborah, Ehud, Jephthah, Samson or Gideon for a national cause. These people were often not from within the tribal structures. The onus was therefore on the people to recognise who God had raised up; to empower them. Similarly for us, God can raise up *different people at different times for different things*. This is how capital-C Church leadership works. The onus is upon us all to recognise a few of these people and to give support, so these individuals can do what they are called to.

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO NATIONALLY UNITED ENDEAVOURS

There are different ways we can work in unity. One way is through intentional unity in common goals – which we each then pursue in our own way. With this approach the autonomy of each leader isn't 'encroached upon'. Consider the shared goal of valuing the Treaty / Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Christian dynamic in our bicultural history. This goal was broadly accepted around 2013, with a notable national change in perspectives resulting since. This success has enabled many to stand more confidently in their faith in the public square. The idea of uniting in simple and sensible *national* goals is therefore a plausible approach, worthy of further consideration.

Another example is unity in getting a task done. Consider the need for engagement with matters affecting the welfare of everyday New Zealanders – like those discussed in Parliament and on public media. Key individuals have initiated efforts like Family First or the Free Speech Union, to serve a valuable purpose in their time. Other individuals might do likewise on various specific topics. NZCN play a representative role, engaging in partnership with denominational leaders to ensure a Christian perspective is stated and heard by politicians and media on some issues. For another example, many saw value in the recent visit from Franklin Graham, with superb events in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. Larger events like these can also reflect a wider message that the Church is still alive, well and present. The Shining Lights Trust plays a role in unity, media and other gospel spaces. Hope Project is of note, helping to maintain public awareness of the Christian dynamic behind our cultural festivals of Christmas and Easter – while also restoring awareness of the wider historical story that sits behind many of our national values. HeLP Project also sits awaiting its time, to help churches together in each location to see their story being told and heard. Campus ministries like TSCF and

Student Life serve in our Tertiary institutions – engaging on our behalf in a way individual churches would not or could not. The point is that God can raise people up for national purposes, to serve in a given season on his behalf – and ours.

### IN SUMMARY...

Whether the approach is one of unity in common goals to effect broad changes, or unity in specific areas of effort, the underlying principle is the same. *God can raise up different people at different times for different things.* If we believe this, we are more likely to have eyes that can identify and support these people in their given season.

At the start of this publication it was suggested that all four 'pistons of outreach' are needed. The Church in this nation needs God to raise up individuals and teams who will engage with city and national trends and needs – rather than only congregational or denominational ones. In fact, with Government and public media ever-more excluding the voice and story of our faith, this is maybe more important now than ever.

May our ability to function 'as one, in one Spirit for the faith of the gospel' (Philippians 1:27), working in unity 'that the world might know' (John 17), become ever-stronger.

### For more

- Four goals with 14 habits that could be easy wins for the united Church: [AllTogether.co.nz/fourgoals/](http://AllTogether.co.nz/fourgoals/)
- URLs relating to mentioned activities. [FamilyFirst.org.nz](http://FamilyFirst.org.nz), [fsu.nz](http://fsu.nz), [nzchristiannetwork.org.nz](http://nzchristiannetwork.org.nz), [AllTogether.co.nz/hopeproject](http://AllTogether.co.nz/hopeproject), [AllTogether.co.nz/helpproject](http://AllTogether.co.nz/helpproject), [TSCF.org.nz](http://TSCF.org.nz), [StudentLife.org.nz](http://StudentLife.org.nz)
- Consider, who might God have raised in this current season to fulfil city or national functions in service to the gospel, his Church and the wellbeing of our people?

