

Travel Update – 8 Dec. 2018

Since my travels down to Southland and Otago, I have been on the move again, this time to Queensland and Fiji. As you know, our new Church President, Greg Williams, is reorganising how GCI is structured administratively. My purpose in going was, in part, to learn more about how this restructuring will affect GCI New Zealand and our denominational linkages with Australia and across the South Pacific.

During his visit here, and again in Australia, Greg Williams outlined his plans for six new administrative regions for GCI, ours being Australasia (comprising Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the South Pacific islands). Within each region he intends a collaborative ministry sharing best practices and resources aimed at spreading the Gospel and strengthening the church.

My four days in Australia (Nov. 23-26), while aimed initially at learning more about the reorganising of this region, was memorable also for its opportunities to meet with members of their board and speak at the Gold Coast congregation's Sunday morning service.

The first day had been set aside for meeting with John McLean, Daphne Sidney and David Jordison in the Australian GCI offices to explore the broad structural connections across our region insofar as these are known (pending a clarifying communique from headquarters that is expected in January). For my part I updated them on the New Zealand, Fiji and Vanuatu churches, the Easter weekend visit to New Zealand of four young Fijian leaders of the future and touched on a new national website for New Zealand being developed by Lianne Trevarthen. John and Daphne in turn told me more of their experience attending the October 14 baton-changing celebration in Charlotte, which was a joyous and seamless transference of the mantle of leadership from Joe Tkach to Greg Williams.

Saturday was devoted to the Australian board's AGM and Directors' Meetings at which I was one of three guests. A good portion of the AGM was set aside for John McLean to update board members on much of what we'd been discussing the day before, and some time also for David Jordison to outline the financial situation of the Church there. Some of this, I expect, may be reported in John's next "Life Together" email (ask Rex Morgan if you desire to receive this monthly update). What I enjoyed most was how similar the flavour of their meetings and fellowship match what we experience in the New Zealand board; it was friendly and light-hearted despite the seriousness of what was being discussed, with comments and suggestions flowing freely from and across the whole group to arrive at consensus.

While I knew most of the board members (John McLean, Daphne Sidney, Matt Gudze, Janiece Harper and Hans Pedersen), it was a pleasure to meet and share accommodation with Peter Edalere of Perth (pictured). Peter, who is Mohan Jayasekera's son-in-law, is to pastor the Perth congregation following Mohan's retirement early next year. He is a quiet and caring individual, and we spent some hours sharing a little of our respective journeys and discussing the pastoral role, its joys and challenges, and a few lessons I'd learned. He is eager to step up to his new responsibilities and I am sure he would appreciate our prayers too for the transition he and his wife face.



Visiting with the Gold Coast congregation again the next day was a real pleasure, this being my third opportunity to do so (it is where Rod and Ruth Matthews regularly fellowship). Also attending were Bill and Daphne Sidney, and Mark Ellis (a now retired elder who I'd known since our college days at Bricket

Wood). Bill, Mark and I later shared a lunch at Broadbeach (site of the June 2015 conference), which is not far from where the Gold Coast church meets.

The return trip to Auckland on Monday wasn't without its drama: a mechanical fault on the Qantas flight to Sydney, the first leg of my journey, resulted in my missing the Air New Zealand flight home (I have pictures, taken from the terminal, of it taxiing and lifting off). I finally did make it over the Tasman about 3 hours later aboard a Qantas flight instead. It all made for a long and tiring day.

Tuesday was spent in Auckland updating Rex (over more than one cup of coffee) before visiting with David and Marilyn Wong at their home and sharing dinner together (later Lianne Trevarthen and Owen Hooper joined us for an Auckland pastoral team meeting). David and Marilyn spoke of their experience and impressions drawn from their visit to the Fijian festival site earlier this year. They clearly enjoyed their time with everyone and were encouraged by the opportunities they perceived for the church there. This was particularly useful for me to hear since I was headed there myself the next morning.

Arriving at Nadi, Isei and Va Colati met me at the terminal and drove me the 190 km to Suva. Aside from enjoying the beauty of their land, we swapped notes on what I'd been learning and what Isei is planning. Along the way we stopped in at Sigatoka to purchase produce for the several meals we would later have ([click here](#) for a short YouTube view of this market).

After dropping my bags at the hotel, I was taken up to the Kanaimawi family home for an evening barbeque the youth of the church had prepared. This made for a particularly enjoyable and meaningful beginning to my visit, especially since I already knew four of them (Eugene Panuve, Epeli Nakautoga, Jason Raki and Joanna Wainibuli) well after their recent visit to Wellington over Easter. They



are a happy and strongly connected group of young people, as the photos show. Before the meal they sang several gospel and other songs and I was struck again by the beauty of their voices and harmonies. Following a splendid meal, I was asked to tell a little of my life in the church and then to respond to questions. What a wonderful privilege it was to tell those stories of my own experiences as a youth growing up in our church,

and of facing the school/work life transition. They are a lovely group of young men and women whose hearts are strongly in their families and faith in the Lord. I left amazingly uplifted and encouraged, confident that God will do wonderful things with and through them long after we oldies will have passed 'over the river' (as the old spiritual describes). Please pray for these young people – they have much to offer and are surely an important part of the future of GCI across the South Pacific.



The next day (Thursday, Nov. 29), again over generous meals, I enjoyed two further opportunities to learn about our Fijian brothers and sisters, and the church. The first of these was brunch, hosted by Isei and Va in their home, to which Teisa Tora was also invited (she sends her greetings to all who know her).

We discussed in some detail the history of Christianity in Fiji, arriving first in the Lau Group east of Suva around 1835. We spoke too of the GCI story and of those who had served the Fijian and wider area in the years since our church was established there in 1979.

Then in the evening, again with Sofi Kanaimawi at her family home, I met with their leadership team: the Colatis, our elder Jope Uqeuqe who had made the long trip over from the west, James Panuve (but sadly not Alisi who was not well) plus Frank and Emily Boyd. I was particularly keen to discuss the proposed alterations to our church's registration in Fiji (still under the WCG banner) and to discuss the necessary steps to achieve both that and a re-writing of GCI Fiji's constitution. Rex and I will be assisting them with this process. Again, please be praying for your brothers and sisters in Fiji, as they do for you, that the church there will be re-established on a solid yet flexible foundation, so it may face with confidence the opportunities and challenges before them.

After such a wonderful couple of days, I was feeling very happy to be heading home. Sadly, this trip too would be eventful, starting with a delay to the Nadi-Auckland connection followed by a cancellation of my flight on to Palmerston North. Being redirected to Wellington, we were advised we would be bussed back to our original destination. I chose to opt out of the bus ride (which would have gotten me home not earlier than 2:00 am), instead arranging to stop with Dennis Gordon, who graciously agreed to put me up for the night. Since I was scheduled to speak that next day in Wellington anyway, it seemed best that Sue drive our car down (as we would have done anyway) and meet me there.

For the moment, GCI is in a transition period as our Church President establishes a new administrative structure. His purpose in doing this is to better support his vision for the future, which begins with our being strong and healthy for our calling, fully committed to and capable of living and sharing the Gospel God has graced us with, and thereby building and growing the church into the years before us. For our part regionally, we enjoy many bonds of connection across this part of the world and my travels to both Australia and Fiji have encouraged me that many opportunities to serve in God's wonderful Kingdom lie before us, and that he is preparing us and those who follow us to reap a bountiful harvest as we follow his leading. To this end, please pray that the way before us is made clear, and that we prove faithful servants in this Kingdom work. Pray too that those tasked to lead the church in this and other parts of the world be enabled (as Paul wrote) to communicate the Gospel clearly and to go through every door of opportunity he sends us forward to.

My prayers are with and for you.

Blessings,
Dennis