



## World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the WDP Committee of Cook Islands

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March 7, 2025

“I Made You Wonderful”

Psalm 139:14

Worship Service

### INTENTION

This program invites us to recognize that God created each one of us with great attention and loving care. God knows us intimately, and we are special to God in our uniqueness. When we open the doors of our hearts to this truth, everything in our life changes. We glow from within, and we begin treating others as beloved children of God. Through this program, we hope people will be spiritually uplifted as they come to trust the great love of God.

### SPEAKING ROLES

Leader 1  
Leader 2  
Leader 3  
Scripture Reader  
Woman 1  
Woman 2  
Woman 3

### PREPARATIONS

Gather the following symbols:

- **Flowers**

Fill the altar space with brightly colored and diverse flowers. All those who are leading during the service can wear flower leis and/or 'ei katu (flower crown or head garland). Have a single flower available for each person who comes to the service. *Tiare Maori* is the National Flower of the Cook Islands and can be used if available. Other flowers common in the Cook Islands include hibiscus, chrysanthemums, and plumeria.

*Flowers are an integral part of Cook Islands identity, symbolizing love, friendship and respect. People frequently wear flower crowns and leis, and flowers often appear on Cook Islands fabrics, art, clothing and quilts (tivaevae).*

- **Blue fabric, bowl of water, shells**

Use blue fabric, a bowl of water, and shells on the altar space to evoke the ocean.

*The ocean is a defining feature of life in the Cook Islands. The ocean is life. It is a source of food, livelihood, and a means of travel. The ocean connects people and communities.*

- **Coconut tree leaves or fruit**

Include a photograph or drawing of a coconut tree. If coconut leaves or fruit are available, these can also be used on the altar space.

*The coconut tree is referred to as the “tree of life” in the Cook Islands, because every part of the tree is useful. It provides food, drink, medicine, handicrafts, and building materials.*

- **Canoe**

Include a canoe (or picture of a canoe) on the altar space.

*The canoe is the traditional means of travel for Cook Islanders. This symbol represents the God-given ingenuity of our Polynesian ancestors who created the canoe.*

- **Bible**

Include a Bible on the altar space, opened to Psalm 139:14.

## **PRELUDE**

*Have the sound of ocean waves playing as participants arrive (10-15 minutes before the service starts). These ocean waves can be audio or video recordings.*

*Distribute a flower to each person who enters. Invite them to put the flower behind their ear or wear it as a lapel.*

## **WELCOME CHANT**

*Leaders 1, 2 and 3 stand together in the front of the congregation as the service begins.*

*Musicians lead the welcome chant.*

Turoū, turoū!  
Oro mai, oro mai!  
E te ao nei!  
Iēkoko!

Welcome, welcome!  
Come all, come all!  
The whole world!

Iēkoko!

## WELCOME AND CENTERING

*Leader 1 speaks. Congregation speaks the words in **BOLD**.*

Kia orana!

Today's worship service comes to us from a group of ecumenical Christian women from the Cook Islands in the Pacific. Kia orana is a phrase in the Maori language that Cook Islanders use to greet each other. Kia orana means more than just hello. It means: May you live long and may you live well. May you shine like the sun. May you dance with the waves.

Our sisters in the Cook Islands have invited the whole world to greet each other today with this Maori phrase. You are welcome to repeat after me:

Kia orana!

**Kia orana!**

May you live long!

**May you live long!**

May you live well!

**May you live well!**

May you shine like the sun!

**May you shine like the sun!**

May you dance with the waves!

**May you dance with the waves!**

*Leader 2 speaks.*

Kia orana!

**Kia orana!**

Take a moment and notice your own breathing.

*(pause)*

Notice how your breath comes in and out, like the waves of the sea.

*(long pause)*

Every one of us gathered here today is breathing! Isn't that astonishing? All of us share in that gift of life. As surely as the waves of the ocean rise and fall, our breath flows in and out.

Let's go ahead now and make a BIG wave! Take a deep breath. Engage and feel this sacred and shared gift of life!

*(pause)*

*Leader 3 speaks.*

Kia orana!

**Kia orana!**

Let's take another moment to connect. For this one, you'll need your imagination! Imagine the blood flowing through your veins and your arteries. Flowing like rivers.

*(pause)*

Just as a river brings nutrients to the shores and the fields of the earth, your blood is bringing nutrients to every organ in your body.

*(long pause)*

Isn't it amazing that God created our bodies to work this way? To bring health and life to every organ within? To keep us strong, alive and vibrant, each and every day?

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Kia orana!

**Kia orana!**

Now, you are invited to find a part of your body that doesn't hurt too much, and try feeling the sensation of your skin dancing through time and space. You might want to wiggle your fingers! Or wiggle your toes! Or perhaps you want to stretch your neck muscles. Maybe you want to touch the skin on your arm, or your face. Or maybe you want to simply sit still and notice how the chair/pew is supporting you.

As you engage your body, remember being a child, when you took delight at simply moving through the world.

*(long pause)*

*Leader 2 speaks.*

God made us wonderful from the very beginning, weaving us together in our mother's womb.

*Leader 3 speaks.*

And the Spirit continues to flow through every moment of every day, helping us to feel the astonishing gift of life.

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Every single one of us is unique, and deeply loved by God. Look around! Look at all who are gathered here today - both in this space, and all around the world. Take a moment to look around and appreciate the gift of each other!

*(long pause as people look around at each other)*

## **SONG OF PRAISE (THEME SONG)**

*Musicians lead the congregation in singing. Leaders 1, 2, 3 remain standing.*

*I am fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are your works, that my soul knows very well.  
And I'll praise you all my days!*

## **OPENING PRAYER**

*Leader 2 speaks.*

Let us pray to our Creator.

God who made us wonderful, thank you for this fellowship of sisters and brothers around the world. As we come together, help us open our hearts to you, and to each other. Quiet our minds from all the worries that preoccupy us. Reconnect us to you, and to each other, so that we all may glow brightly, and radiate your love to the world. Amen.

Let us listen now to God, through the voices of women from the Cook Islands.

*Musicians lead the congregation in acapella humming of the theme song melody at a slower tempo. During the humming, Leaders 1, 2, and 3 can sit down, and Woman 1 can stand up.*

## **SCRIPTURE, STORY & SONG**

### **Psalms 139:1-6 (NRSV)**

*Scripture Reader speaks either from the back of the congregation or offstage.*

A reading from the book of Psalms.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,

and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Let us listen now to our first story, the story of Mii – God Knows Us.

## Story 1: God Knows Us

*Woman 1 speaks.*

Kia orana.

My name is Mii. I am 15 years old.

February 2022 was a scary month for me. It was the month that my family first had contact with someone who was Covid-19 positive.

When I first heard about it, I freaked out. My dad felt bad because he was the one who brought it into our home. I was really upset. I thought we were going to die. I knew people who had died from COVID. I thought that I would die and not see my nephew when he was born.

I started to think about things that I haven't experienced yet. I started to pray. I pleaded with God to look after my family. I didn't know what would happen next. I turned to the Lord and asked for guidance. I was terrified and scared, but I knew that prayer would help me to feel calm. And it worked. I stopped crying and the pressure lifted from my heart.

And then I realized that God knows every detail of my life. God knows my distress and fear. God knows. And knowing that God knows and cares about me helps me to feel calm when I am afraid.

God knows me. And God knows you. And God knows everything we are going through.

*Musicians lead all in acapella humming of the theme song melody. During the humming, Woman 1 sits down, and Woman 2 gets into place.*

## **Psalms 139:7-12 (NRSV)**

*Scripture Reader speaks either from the back of the congregation or offstage.*

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and night wraps itself around me,"



even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

Let us listen now to our second story, the story of Vainiu – God is With Us.

## **Story 2: God is With Us**

### *Woman 2 speaks.*

Kia orana. My name is Vainiu.

I was born in 1958 on the island of Aitutaki. My parents and grandparents believed strongly in the value of culture for a good upbringing. I attended Araura Primary School. For the first 3 years of my education, Cook Islands Maori was the language of instruction. However, as I moved on in school, it became clear that a lot of importance was placed on the English language. Sadly, the schools that I attended encouraged us to speak English in our classes and on the playground. We were told by our teachers not to speak our mother tongue. We were told to immerse ourselves in the English language. Unfortunately, many at the time believed that English was the universal language, the language of trade, and therefore the language of superiority. The influence by the West in those days was powerful. I struggled with this, as I was fluent in Maori and spoke little English.

My grandmother, Mama Mereanu, encouraged her grandchildren to speak Maori. I looked up to Mama Mereana. She had a huge impact on my childhood. She was my mentor and role model in the way of life. It was through her that I learned valuable and lifelong skills of how to plant and prepare food, and to speak the Reo Aitutakian dialect properly. I strongly believe that our elders play a significant role in shaping who we are and where we come from.

The English language has gained momentum over the years and the value of our Maori language has diminished. Formal education during the early years of my life did not have a positive impact on me because what I learned at home from my parents, grandparents and family contradicted what I was taught by my teachers in a Western classroom. The books and lessons that we read and learned from were all in English. I used to think to myself, how are these English books and lessons going to help me plant vegetables, make the umu (ground oven), cook food, wash the clothes and feed the chickens and pigs. A strong feeling of loss led me to withdraw from engaging in the classroom.

One time in school, I remember being caught speaking our indigenous language. My teacher punished me by making me wear a cardboard sign that said, “I am a Maori speaker.” She put me on detention and, on a hot day, made me pull out prickly weeds called “pikikaa” on the school

playground. I was humiliated and shamed in front of my peers. I never forgot that day. As a result of that experience, I was determined to speak English and say little about my mother tongue. This is just one example of how my language and culture was devalued.

God gave us unique and special languages throughout the world, and we should honor and respect those languages. I believe that the Maori language needs to be paramount in our teaching and learning environment. Teachers and students can encourage Maori to be spoken, taught and written in all subjects. And parents can give our Maori language a chance to survive by speaking it at home.

During those formative years in my childhood, even though I was devalued and shamed by the school system, I know that God was still with me. Even when we are cast out and treated with disrespect, God is still with us. God goes with us to the darkness at the bottom of the ocean, where there is no light. And God helps lead us out of that darkness into a wonderful light.

Kia orana e kia manuia. Thank you for listening to my story. God bless you.

*Musicians lead all in acapella humming of the theme song melody. During the humming, Woman 2 sits down, and Woman 3 gets into place.*

### **Psalms 139:13-18 (NRSV)**

*Scripture Reader speaks either from the back of the congregation or offstage.*

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Let us listen now to the story of Dr. Dawn – God Made us Wonderful.

### Story 3: God Made us Wonderful

#### *Woman 3 speaks.*

Kia orana. My name is Dr. Dawn.

Becoming a doctor was one of the hardest things I have ever done. But it is worth it when a mother shares that her child is now healthy and thriving after I did my part in helping to save that child's life. It truly warms my heart. One time, a girl who had not seen me for over 10 years came up and hugged me, saying I am still her "baby doctor." I enjoy working with children so much. They give me strength to go on serving at a time when the Cook Islands faces the threat of our workforce leaving the country.

I graduated as a doctor in 2003 after 7 years of studying in Fiji. At that time, there was a focus on building up paediatrics in the Cook Islands. I became the first female Cook Islands doctor at the Paediatric Department of the Cook Islands, after my predecessor Dr Henry Daiwo. I would also like to mention Dr. Munro who looked after our paediatric ward previously.

One of my first priorities as a baby doctor was to make sure all babies got a check-up by our team within 24 hours. I also helped us to become more equipped and skilled to handle very sick and premature newborns. We established guidelines and protocols to help direct our work. We improved the connection between the Cook Islands and our great supporters from Auckland and Starship Hospital in New Zealand. Having more specialised care has been a major factor in improving the health of our children. We pride ourselves on being the only Pacific island country to have no maternal deaths since 1995.

Other areas of our healthcare system in the Cook Islands have also improved over the decades. Specialised care has greatly improved since the 1990s as the focus moved from infectious diseases to curative medicine. Our screening programs for cervical and breast cancers have greatly improved. However, there is still work to be done. We must focus on offering better primary health care and preventing noncommunicable diseases and pandemics. We need to focus on mental health. We need to strengthen support systems for our elderly. Our teenage pregnancies still need to be addressed. Although accessibility to contraception is relatively easy, the uptake needs more encouragement. Our communities must act and take accountability for their own health. Health and wellness are a job for everyone. We can only improve if we work together.

God created me wonderful by blessing me with the motivation and opportunity to study medicine. And I responded to God's blessing by serving the people of the Cook Islands as a doctor. As I have worked in healthcare over the years, I realize more and more that God has made all of us wonderful. Our bodies, minds and spirits were knit together by our loving Creator. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. We all are fearfully and wonderfully made.

## **SONG OF PRAISE**

*Musicians lead all in singing the theme song. During the singing, Woman 3 sits down.*

*I am fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are your works, that my soul knows very well.  
And I'll praise you all my days!*

*You are fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are God's works, that my soul knows very well.  
And I'll praise God all my days!*

*We are fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are God's works, that we now know very well.  
And we'll praise God all our days!*

## **INTERCESSORY PRAYERS**

*Someone from the music team speaks.*

As we come to our time of prayer, let us prepare our hearts to come before God. When we pray, we deepen our relationship to God. And when we deepen our relationship to God, we become more connected to all of God's creation. Let us open our hearts and spirits to God.

*Musicians lead all in singing the prayer song. During the singing, Leaders 1, 2 and 3 get into place.*

*God who knows us,  
God who is with us,  
God who made us,  
to you we pray.*

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Magnificent God, we stand in awe of you. We give you glory because of who you are – the Creator of the entire world. You created the beautiful Cook Islands - the fertile lands, the mountains, and the oceans. And you created beauty in every part of the world. You created roosters on the land, and whales in the sea. And you formed us - human beings - fearfully and wonderfully made in your image. All of creation reveals Your majestic glory.

*Musicians reprise the prayer song. Then, Leader 2 speaks.*

Faithful God, thank you for taking care of us in every moment of our lives. You have been with us in our fear and our anxiety. Our depression and our frustration. You have helped us bear financial limitations and uncertainties about the future. You have been present with us through cyclones and tsunamis, wildfires and earthquakes. You held us through the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the physical and mental well-being of so many.

God, thank you for all the women leading our powerful prayer movement. We praise you for the mamas who have passed the World Day of Prayer baton from the past into the present.

God of Abundance, we are truly grateful for you. And we cannot help but praise You for your faithfulness.

*Musicians reprise the prayer song. Then, Leader 3 speaks.*

God of Mercy, we come before you with humble hearts seeking Your forgiveness of our many sins – in word, in deed, and in thoughts. We have spoken unkind words to those around us, neglecting to treat them as wonderfully made by you. We have polluted the oceans and destroyed the environment, neglecting to care for your beautiful creation. Our pride and lack of courage have caused harm to ourselves and others. All of this has caused us to miss out on your blessings and love.

*Musicians reprise the prayer song. Then, Leader 1 speaks.*

Gracious God, please hear the longings of our hearts. Re-create your character and image within us. Open our spiritual eyes and minds to accept our divine beauty. And inspire us to share this beauty with others. God, help us to honour the divine beauty in everyone, appreciating each person that you have created. Wise Teacher/Patient God, help us to recognize that you are always present, no matter what circumstances we face. Loving Spirit, we need your embrace, so that we might shine and radiate your love to the whole world.

*Musicians reprise the prayer song. Then, Leader 2 speaks.*

God of Wisdom, we pray for the leaders in our world. Guide their hearts and minds to have integrity as they make decisions. Inspire them, and bless them with vision to move our world towards unity and peace.

We pray for women and girls who are vulnerable in our societies. Create the conditions so that elderly women can live with respect and dignity. Give our young women the education, aspiration and vision to develop into a promising future. Provide strength, courage and patience to all women experiencing domestic violence.

God of Healing, restore us to wellness. Heal us from physical diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Relieve us from mental illness and heal our emotional wounds. Protect us from the selfishness and greed that threaten our spiritual well-being.

God, help our World Day of Prayer movement unite our communities in prayer. Help us make your love visible. Strengthen us to continue loving and supporting all who are in need. Lead us to treat others as wonderfully made by you, so that all people would feel that they are important, cared for, and treasured.

*Musicians reprise the prayer song. Then, Leader 3 speaks.*

Now let us continue by singing the Lord's Prayer in Maori, the heart language of our sisters from the Cook Islands. After we sing, we will speak the Lord's Prayer in our own heart languages.

*[Note: Alternatively, the congregation can sing the Lord's Prayer in both Maori and the local language. In this case, the Lord's Prayer does not need to be spoken by the congregation.]*

*Musicians lead all in singing the Lord's Prayer in Maori. Then, Leader 3 speaks.*

Let us now speak the Lord's Prayer in our heart languages.

*All speak the Lord's Prayer together.*

## **OFFERTORY**

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Amen.

Today we have been blessed by witness of Christian women from Cook Islands. The 3 stories they shared have connected us to their lives. These women from the Cook Islands have given

generously of their time and talents to make this World Day of Prayer not only possible, but beautiful.

We come now to a time of offering. The World Day of Prayer is a movement led by Christian women that unites the world in prayer. As we pray with our sisters from the Cook Islands, we are moved to prayerful action. Giving our financial resources is one way we can act so that all women and girls can live with dignity and respect.

*Leader 1 explains how the offering will be used. Following the explanation, Leader 1 speaks.*

While we are giving our offering, let us enjoy this *imeni tuki* – or sacred hymn – by our siblings in the Cook Islands. May we open our hearts and give generously.

*A recording of Cook Islanders singing can be played while the offering is taken. Alternatively, a local choir could engage this imeni tuki.*

*During the Offertory, Leaders 1, 2 and 3 can sit down.*

*“Kia aruru te enua katoa” (Let the lands rejoice in thunderous acclamation)*

*Towards the end of the musical offering, Leader 1 stands up and speaks.*

Let us pray.

God, we dedicate this offering to you. Thank you for all the gifts you have given to us. Bless the gifts we offer now to you, so that they may bless the world. Amen.

## **A MUTUAL BLESSING**

*Leader 2 stands up and speaks. Leader 1 sits down.*

As a second part of our offering, and in response to all that has been shared today, let us take a moment to greet a few people around us.

You can start by saying “Kia orana!” And then you can say something that you love about that person. After you say what you love about the person, you can end by saying “God made you wonderful!”

If you know the person well, you might say “Kia orana! I love how you treat everyone with kindness and respect! God made you wonderful!”

Or, “Kia orana! You are the best cook I know! God made you wonderful!”

Or, “Kia orana! I love how dedicated you are to your kids. God made you wonderful!”

If you don’t know them very well, you might say “Kia orana! I love your smile! God made you wonderful!”

Or “Kia orana! I love your shirt! God made you wonderful!”

So, let’s offer a mutual blessing to each other now.

*While people are greeting each other, the instrumentalists can play the theme song in the background.*

*After a minute or two, the music team transitions into a reprise of singing the theme song. During the theme song, Leaders 1, 2 and 3, and Women 1, 2 and 3 get in place to speak.*

*I am fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are your works, that my soul knows very well.  
And I’ll praise you all my days!*

*You are fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are God’s works, that my soul knows very well.  
And I’ll praise God all my days!*

*We are fearfully made, and wonderfully made.  
Marvelous are God’s works, that we now know very well.  
And we’ll praise God all our days!*



## COMMITMENT TO 'PRAYERFUL ACTION'

*Leader 1 speaks.*

So what now? What happens when we realize that God is with us and for us? What changes when we recognize that we are fearfully and wonderfully made?

*Leader 2 speaks.*

What we believe often becomes our reality. When we think differently, we live differently. Changing the way we think changes the way we act.

*Leader 3 speaks.*

Each one of us is God's masterpiece. How will that realization cause us to live differently?

*Woman 1 speaks.*

Like Mii, when we realize that God knows us, we can find peace amidst our fears.

*Woman 2 speaks.*

Like Vainiu, when we trust that God is always with us, we can find strength even in the midst of struggles.

*Woman 3 speaks.*

And like Dr. Dawn, when we understand that we are unique and special, made wonderful by God, we can use our gifts and talents to serve and bless the world.

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Our motto in World Day of Prayer is "Informed Prayer, Prayerful Action." So let us take one last moment together. As we listen again to the ocean waves, let us ask how God is calling us into a new way of being in the world - into "prayerful action."

*Play recording of the ocean waves for 1-2 minutes.*

## BLESSING

*Leader 1 speaks.*

Go now, and live this good news:

*Leader 2 speaks.*

God is our Creator. God made us wonderful. God knows us, and God is with us.

*Leader 3 speaks.*

Treat yourself as a precious and beloved child of God. And treat others as precious and beloved children of God.

Amen!

## **POSTLUDE**

*Musicians can play an instrumental version of the theme song as the leaders move to greet people.*

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