

Suva Declaration

The Suva Declaration on Participation in God's Mission in and from the Pacific.

Occasion

At the invitation of the Fiji Baptist Convention and with the facilitation of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation sixty overseas delegates representing Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia/Papua, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Singapore, South Korea, the United States of America (Hawai'i and Virginia) and Vanuatu gathered with one hundred members of the Fiji Baptist Convention to address the theme, "Opportunity Pasifika: Witnessing to All by All Means."

We worshipped, led by local and overseas brothers and sisters together and inspired by the contributions of Fijian young people as they offered the vigour and beauty of indigenous dance forms in the service of praise and devotion to God. We were challenged to recover acceptance of the Bible as our supreme and infallible authority and guide, to reignite our passion to carry out the Great Commission as a way of fulfilling God's command to love him and to love our neighbours (the Great Commandment.)

We were informed and moved as we heard from each other about our current realities; we were encouraged and sometimes surprised as we sought to discern what God is doing across our region; and we were energized as we entered into profound dialogue with one another about the opportunities and challenges relating to our present and future participation in God's mission of transformation.

We praise God for the gift that this consultation has been to us and for the provision that has made possible the participation of each one. We are grateful for the wonderful hospitality of the Fijian Baptist Convention and the diligent work of planning, administration and leadership that brought this group of participants together.

Through these days together we have become more fully aware of our Pacific context and its realities; in worship and discussion we have discovered shared convictions that we wish to affirm; and in light of those, and in dependence on the help of the Holy Spirit, there are attitudes and actions to which we shall commit ourselves.

We have learned that . . .

- Our Pacific region and its near neighbours from which APBF members are drawn span a bewildering diversity of social, religious and political contexts, from remote island communities to ultra-modern mega-cities, from people with no formal education to university students and graduates, from nations that are at least nominally Christian to others where followers of Jesus are in a tiny minority, from economically disadvantaged communities to affluent societies.
- There is a diversity of specific challenges to the mission and life of our churches, from cultural expressions of Christianity that seem remote from the New Testament's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications to authentic Christian life empowered by the Holy Spirit to religious or political opposition and even persecution of Christians.)
- Although experienced differently in different places, the phenomenon of the movement of people and peoples through migration both within and into the Pacific region is impacting many of our contexts.

- Across the region we experience the problem of domestic violence, a symptom of a more general problem of gender inequality and harmful attitudes to women both in societies and in our churches.
- Another issue that we share is that of young people increasingly disconnected from older generations in their families and churches, inhabiting and shaped by a globalized world accessed through smart phones and the internet that is quite foreign to the world experienced by their parents and Christian leaders; and in many cases drawn into drug and alcohol use and damaging sexual behaviours.
- In a turbulent, changing world many people in all our contexts find themselves on the margins of human society.
- Climate change has implications for all of us, but Pacific nations are especially vulnerable to the effects of rising sea levels.
- Some of our member churches and associations have hard-won experience in disaster response and recovery, and assisting communities in the wake of racial discord and conflict; and there is within our Federation considerable expertise and access to resources in Aid, Development and Peace Building.
- There is great capacity in the member churches of the APBF in terms of people, experience, infrastructure, financial resources, training institutions, programmes, etc. But this capacity is not evenly distributed.
- Among Baptist churches and associations in our region there already exists a degree of collaboration both through formal channels and informal relationships, but there is great need and desire for fuller and more effective partnership.

Together we affirm that . . .

- Every part of our region and its people matters to God and is the object of God's love and the mission that He calls us to participate in.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is central to the life and mission of the church, as it is proclaimed and performed in the power of the Spirit, to not only within our region but also throughout the world.
- Just as in the biblical narrative, God continues to work in and through the movement of people to grow His Kingdom, build His Church, and bless the nations of the earth.
- God created both woman and man in His image, values them equally, pours out His Spirit upon both women and men and equips women and men together for participation in His mission; the contribution of women in our local, regional and national church bodies must be more fully welcomed and enabled.
- Our young people are pioneer disciples and missionaries living out their faith in the new worlds opened up by successive revolutions in communication technology; their participation in God's mission and in the life of our churches is to be valued and encouraged.
- Our ministries with children, Christian education and discipleship are vital and deserve the best resourcing that we can give to them.
- Hope springing from the resurrection of Jesus Christ moves us to reach out the persons living in the margins of our communities and engage with those whom others reject.
- Life in the Spirit means seeking and building peace in our churches, communities and nations.

- We are together stewards of the earth as God's creation and that care for the environment is a part of our worship and witness until the time of consummation of God's entire creation.
- God will equip us to do what He calls us to do, and part of that equipping will come through one another as we share life and mission together, each part contributing and receiving as members of the one body, for the glory of God.

We commit to God and to one another that . . .

- We will pray and strategize as a Federation for fuller participation in the mission of God that remains to be realized in our Asia-Pacific region and beyond.
- We will in our various contexts look for the activity of God in the movement of peoples into and within our region and seek to participate in what God is doing by taking opportunities for evangelism, mission and discipleship
- In the face of the reality of domestic violence and the attitudes that contribute to it we will scrutinize our church life, our theological teaching and training, our local, national and regional structures, and our own attitudes and actions, asking God to bring to light all that obstructs women from being and doing all that God has created and called them to be and to do. We will take steps to remove those obstacles.
- We will value, encourage and support our young people and give them scope to serve and grow in their participation in the mission of God and the life of His church.
- We will value and channel resources into our ministries with children.
- In our mission and in our life as communities of faith in Jesus Christ we will go to whomever the Spirit of God leads us to, especially to those on the margins of our societies and seek to embrace them into the love of God and of His people.
- We will seek peace and work to build our capacity to be peace-makers, in cooperation with other people of peace wherever they may be found.
- We will scrutinize our practices in relation to our stewardship of God's earth, and act to change habits that damage the environment.
- We will value each other and actively seek collaboration in every aspect of our participation in God's mission, including theological reflection and training, aid, development and peace building, and transnational and transformational ministry and mission.

Baptist Pacific Forum (APBF)