



World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the WDP Committee of Cook Islands

March 7, 2025

“I Made You Wonderful”

Psalm 139:14

Country Background

Cook Islanders are proud of our unique and special culture. We are friendly, vibrant, colorful, courageous, hospitable and enthusiastic. This Country Background was written by a group of Cook Islands women for the World Day of Prayer celebration in 2025. We invite the world to learn more about us from the information provided below.

GEOGRAPHY

The Cook Islands consist of 15 islands scattered over 2 million square kilometers within the Pacific Ocean. Out of the 15 islands, 12 are inhabited. They lie in the center of the Polynesian Triangle and are surrounded by neighboring Polynesian islands - Tonga, Samoa, Tahiti and islands of French Polynesia. Archeologists trace the settlement of the islands to the 4th century C.E. The capital of the Cook Islands is Rarotonga, a volcanic island with a population of 10,040 (of 15,040 total people). Many Cook Islanders now live abroad in New Zealand (approximately 80,000) and Australia (approximately 20,000). The current population living in the Cook Islands reflects a massive decrease in population over recent decades.

72% of all Cook Islands residents live on the main island in Rarotonga, with the remaining 28% living in the Pa Enea. Of that later figure, 21% live in the southern group islands of Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia, Mauke and Mitiaro. The remaining 7% live in the northern group islands of Palmerston, Manihiki, Rakahanga, Pukapuka, Nassau and Penrhyn.

HISTORY

The 15 islands that are now called Cook Islands were first thought to have been inhabited between 500-800 A.D., by people from islands in what is now known as French Polynesia. They came in great double hulled canoes, navigating by familiar stars, wave movements and temperature differences. They were well known seafarers. Polynesians are thought to have migrated from Asia starting in 1500 B.C. Cook Islanders are true Polynesians, connecting directly back to the finest seafarers of the Pacific.

Oral history tells that the island of Avaiki (thought to be Ra’iatea in the Society Islands) was the “mother of the lands” and the origin of the Polynesian people. Ru was a young explorer living in Avaiki, who loved to discover new islands. Ru left Avaiki with his family and 20 young women of royal blood to help him on his voyage to find new land. While going through a terrible storm, Ru called on Tangaroa – god of the ocean – for help. The clouds parted and the star shone through, guiding Ru’s canoe to follow the star in a southwestern course. Eventually, Ru made landfall on the island now known as Aitutaki. All the district chiefs today can trace their ancestry to the 20 royal virgins who came with Ru. The places named by Ru still have the same names today, except the name of the island.

In the 11th century, a High Chief named Toi built the ancient inland coral road in Rarotonga, known as the *Ara Metua*. Each tribe had its own *marae* (sacred meeting place) and worshipped gods. The *koutu* was the most important meeting place of all, the ruling seat of the *ariki* where feasts, offerings and sacrifices were held. These historical sites are still preserved today.

In the 13th century, two warriors were at sea in search of the island now known as Rarotonga. Tangiia (a Tahitian) and Karika (a Samoan) joined forces against Tutapu (Tangiia's brother). Eventually, Tangiia and Karika conquered the earlier inhabitants, and founded the 6 main tribes of Rarotonga. Today, Rarotonga's *Pa* and *Tinomana Ariki* titles descend from Tangiia's people, while the *Makea Ariki* descend from Karika.

The first record of Europeans in the Cook Islands came in the late 16th century with the Spanish explorer, Álvaro de Mendaña, sighting the island of Pukapuka on August 20, 1595. Another Spaniard, Pedro Fernandez de Queirós, stopped for provisions in Rakahanga on March 2, 1606. After this, there is no further record of European contact for 150 years. The British explorer, Captain James Cook came to the islands in his expeditions of 1773 and 1777. Despite the islands eventually carrying the great navigator's namesake, Captain Cook only went ashore on the then uninhabited island of Palmerston. Cook also never sighted the largest island Rarotonga. That honor was left to the mutineers on HMS Bounty, who landed on Rarotonga in 1789, during their escape to the Pitcairn Islands. Captain Cook had named the group the Hervey Islands, after a British Lord of the Admiralty, but they were renamed Cook Islands, in honor of the great explorer, some 50 years later by the Russian cartographer, Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern.

CHRISTIANITY

The Gospel was brought to the Cook Islands in 1821 through the London Missionary Society (LMS) by John Williams. Christianity was accepted first in the island of Aitutaki by the Paramount Chief, Tamatoa Ariki. In 1823, the Gospel was accepted in Nga-Pu-Toru, (meaning "the three roots" of Atiu, Mitiaro and Mauke) by the Paramount Chief, Rongomatane *Nga'akaara* Ariki, as well as in the island of Rarotonga, by the Paramount Chief, Tinomana Enuarurutini Ariki. In 1824, the Gospel was accepted in the island of Mangaia by Paramount Chief, Numangatini Ariki. The missionaries attempted to suppress the singing, dancing and drumming of the Cook Islands inhabitants. However, this was the cultural heritage of the islands, and eventually, Cook Islanders found a way to beautifully blend their Polynesian heritage with their Christian faith.

In 1839, the Takamoa Theological College was established in Rarotonga to train mostly locals in theological studies, leading to a large number of pastors and church leaders in the Cook Islands. This college is the second oldest institution in the Cook Islands for theological study.

Today, the Cook Islands is a majority Christian nation, where the people are driven by a strong sense of community and cultural values that come from their belief in God. In 1968, the Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council was set up to advise the government and traditional leaders on key issues affecting the social, economic and cultural development affairs of the people of the Cook Islands. The Religious Advisory Council also oversees

religious events, functions and undertakings of major government and community programmes. This council is made up of The Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Assembly of God Church and Apostolic Church. The largest church is the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), which comprises approximately 49% of Christians in the Cook Islands.

Christians in the Cook Islands come together annually for ecumenical prayer. We seek God's protection over our nation during the cyclone season, and we offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's continuous protection and blessings over our beautiful Cook Islands. How unique and wonderful it is when we come together in prayer and worship.

There was a great celebration in 2021 by the people of Aitutaki, marking 200 years of Christianity in the Cook Islands. In 2023, at the time that this Country Background was being finalized, plans were developed and carried for the 200 year celebration of Christianity throughout the Cook Islands. All denominations are engaged, and people from New Zealand and Australia came to honor this celebration.

WOMEN

This World Day of Prayer program is written from the perspective of Cook Islands women. The group who wrote this section have chosen to highlight the achievements and struggles of women in our society.

The diverse roles undertaken by our women are significant in contributing to the fabric of our Cook Islands societies. Each congregation/ekalesia define their leadership roles as required. Cook Islands women glorify God in their leadership roles in the churches, in sports, as teachers, cultural groups, fundraising groups, non-government organisation groups (Women of the Month), Women in Ura fitness (akauka/tamure.), Sports Official, Chefs, Waitresses, Radio Announcers, schools, News Reporters, Coaches, Heads of Ministries of Government, Board Members, Bankers, administrators, Tourism, Agriculture, Gardening, Environment, Lawyers, Hairdressers, Beauticians and the list goes on. How wonderful are we made!

Women *Ariki* (Paramount Chiefs)

The *Ariki* are a group of hereditary paramount chiefs of noble rank in Polynesia. Each island in the Cook Islands is ruled by a group of *Ariki*, whose status comes not just from birth, but also from their achievements and respect within the community.

Below are just a few of the women, past and present, who have served in these traditional Cook Islands leadership roles with distinction, dignity and integrity. This section honors their tenacity, sacrifice, commitment, obligation, knowledge, courage and business acumen.

Makea Takau Ariki (1839 – 1911) served the island of Rarotonga for 40 years as the *Ariki* of the dynasty Makea Nui (Great Makea). It was under her reign that the Cook Islands became a British protectorate in 1888, before being annexed to New Zealand in 1901.

Dame Makea Margaret Karika Ariki (1919 - 2017) held the *Ariki* position for 68 years, serving in many community organizations over her tenure. She opened a new courthouse in Rarotonga, and championed environmental causes.

Rongomatane Ada Teapurepure Tetupu Ariki (1948 – 2018) was an *Ariki* on the island of Atiu for 50 years. She was known as the “people’s queen,” because of her tireless dedication to serving all the people of Cook Islands. She was also the patron of the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW).

Pa Tapaeru Teariki Upokotini Marie Ariki (b. 1947) was invested with the *Ariki* title in 1990 on the island of Rarotonga. She has been a lifelong supporter of the struggle against diabetes in the Cook Islands. She was appointed to the Consul in Auckland, and has been known for fostering relationships between Cook Islands and New Zealand.

Manarangi Tutai Ariki (b. 1946) was invested as *Ariki* on the island of Aitutaki in 1997. Her lineage comes directly from Ru-enua the discoverer of Aitutaki. She was trained as a school teacher, and strives to be a visible symbol of the Maori identity.

Ngamaru Tupuna Moeroa Ariki (b. 1996) was invested as *Ariki* on the island of Atiu at the age of 25 years old in July 2021.

Womens’ NGOs

Womens’ non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Cook Islands support various aspects of women’s empowerment within their lives, families and in the work place. Examples of womens’ NGOs include Cook Islands Business and Professional Women (CIBPW) and Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW). These organizations continuously evaluate and monitor areas such as: crisis support services, social and economic justice, environmental issues, gender equality, business, opportunities for young women, legal advice, elderly support and mental health. With the ongoing support of key stakeholders, and in collaboration with government agencies, awareness has slightly increased of the barriers faced by women. These organizations have helped women overcome challenges and have their voices heard.

Domestic Violence

Many domestic violence incidents continue to go unreported. These are some types of abuse experienced by women in the Cook Islands: physical, emotional, verbal, financial and psychological abuse, as well as bullying. These happen both within the family and the workplace. Ongoing work to continue eradicating domestic violence within our society requires our leaders to make a conscious effort to assist vulnerable women and children. We pray for increased understanding of this devastating phenomenon, and for improved resources, trained counselors, and intervention and prevention services. Male and female facilitators are needed to educate our society on how to resist domestic violence.

Currently, there is some concern being raised on why abortion (a sensitive subject) is part of the Crimes Act 1996, rather than addressed as a health concern. Discussion and debate is still underway for the health, safety and security of women being transferred from the Crimes Act to the Health Act.

Business

We celebrate Cook Islands women in business who are established authors, poets, artists, photographers, jewelers, carvers and designers of unique apparel fabrics (TAV's). Exhibitions, fashion shows and presentations are held locally and internationally to promote these products. We are also supporting emerging female artists who are currently establishing their labels and products.

Women stall holders and their families sell their products at the renowned Punanga Nui Market in Rarotonga. Roadside stall holders around the island also have abundant local produce, food, art, tivaevae, pareu (sarong), jewelry, woven hats, fans, and baskets. In the Pa Enea (Outer Islands), the vibrancy of the market stalls support the economy of each island by selling a variety of produce and products.

Celebrating 2 Courageous Cook Islands Women

Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe (1930-2022) was a distinguished and accomplished scholar, author, lecturer, historian, academic, editor, anthropologist and creative writer. She is celebrated nationally and internationally for her remarkable career. Amongst her written work is a foundational text for the Pacific "The Works of Tau'unga; Records of a Polynesian Traveller in the South Seas 1833-1896" (ANU Press, 1968). Marjorie completed her Master of Arts Degree in 1974 with a dissertation entitled – *Maretu's Narrative of Cook Islands History* – later published as *'Cannibals and Converts Radical Change in the Cook Islands* (USP Press, 1983). Remarkably, she continued throughout her life to lobby the University of the South Pacific to develop a full degree program in her much loved Cook Islands Maori language. Her efforts were successful, and the program was introduced in 2018. The first students graduated with a Diploma in Cook Islands Maori in 2021.

Nikki Rattle (b. 1951) was Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament from 2012-2021. She was appointed to this position under the Temporary Special Measures (TSM) strategy, which aimed to increase the representation of women in Parliament. There is ongoing discussion among political parties around policies to increase women's representation in parliament. There is still some considerable work to be completed in this area. In 2022, she was appointed as the new *Ombudsman*, an office established to conduct independent and impartial investigations. Her role is to find a balance between the government and the public expectations of government. Rattle has been a passionate and influential advocate for gender equality throughout her career.

LAND

The Cook Islands are in an enviable position where most people own and live off the riches of their own land. Cook Islanders are proud to be wonderful caretakers of their family tribal land. Major changes to the land system began in 1901 when Britain transferred administrative control of the Cook Islands to New Zealand. The "land tenure system" was established

through the Cook Islands Act of 1915, which stipulated that native land could not be bought or sold, except to the government for public purposes. Instead, all native land would be passed to the children of Cook Islanders. Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu follow this Act of 1915, though the rest of the islands use the tribal system.

TOURISM

The Cook Islands' first international airport opened in 1973 on the island of Rarotonga. Tourists began to arrive in significant numbers soon after. Before the opening of the airport, agriculture represented the main industry of the country, but tourism is now the main industry. In the 1950s, agriculture accounted for over 70% of the labour force, whereas now it is less than 10%. Today, tourism accounts for 66% of the country's GDP (as of 2019). The islands of Rarotonga and Aitutaki receive the majority of tourists. Most tourists are from New Zealand and Australia, followed by Europe and the United States. In 2019, 170,000 people visited the Cook Islands. Most visitors arrive by air travel, but around 9,000 cruise passengers and 120 yacht visitors arrive each year by boat.

The Cook Islands has more than 800 accommodation providers, including backpacker hostels, family home stays, self-catering villas and luxury hotels. Key tourism attractions include coral reefs and atolls, sandy lagoon beaches, forests, waterfalls, volcanic peaks and cultural events displaying local music, song, dance, and food. In the Cook Islands, tourism is often described as being both a blessing and a curse. Tourism brings both advantages and disadvantages for the residents of the country. On the positive side, tourism brings money into the economy and creates jobs and employment. It also brings benefits as the government spends money on programmes to beautify the island and develop infrastructure for the tourists. On the negative side, some tourists show poor behaviour while on vacation, leading to noise complaints and issues such as pollution. Another negative is that the high number of tourists can put pressure on natural resources, such as water, and drive up the cost of living.

Economic dependence on tourism meant economic hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Cook Islands lost 3% of their GDP each month. However, on the positive side, the impact of the pandemic has led to a rethinking of tourism and the country's economic strategy. New possibilities are emerging for a more sustainable tourism and initiatives to diversify the country's economy.

EDUCATION

Education has the power to change people's lives. The knowledge that is gained can be used to shape our future and educate generations to come. It is the key that unlocks the door of opportunity. Education has always been important in our Cook Islands society, and it serves to unite and strengthen our country.

Education in the Cook Islands has close ties with the educational system of New Zealand. Early childhood education focuses on children from birth to 5 years. Children ages 3-5 are eligible to attend Early Childhood Education centers, although it is non-compulsory. However, it is seen as one of the most important times for children, as it builds the foundation for future learning.

Primary and secondary education are free and attendance is compulsory for children between the ages of 5-15. For the first 3 years (ages 5-8), the language of instruction in the Cook Islands is Maori. In year 4, the teachers start introducing the English language. After year 10, the children start taking exams in English and Maori. After year 12, a child can enter tertiary studies in New Zealand and other tertiary institutions around the world if they meet the prerequisite of those institutions.

The Cook Islands has 2 tertiary campuses if learners want to stay in the country to study. The first is the University of the South Pacific (USP). The USP's main campus is in Fiji, but the Cook Islands have a satellite campus. The Cook Islands government helps fund USP, like other nations in the Pacific. The second tertiary campus is the Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI). It has 2 campuses (the Hospitality and Trades campuses.) Courses at the CITTI are offered to meet the needs of our tourism industry, ensuring that we have trained people to meet the demands.

The Cook Islands launched a Labour Force Survey in 2019, which recorded education levels. 80.2% of the labor force had participated in the tertiary level, with females and males having the same levels of achievement.

A concern on the capital island of Rarotonga is the decrease in people speaking the Cook Islands Maori language. More and more families are speaking English in their homes. Teachers at the schools are faced with the dilemma where many children do not know how to speak Cook Islands Maori when they first start school. Many Cook Islanders who were born before 1965 were subjected to physical and verbal abuse for speaking their Cook Islands Maori language, and today, Cook Islands Maori is listed as an endangered language on the UNESCO spectrum. Excellent progress has been made in Aotearoa/New Zealand to revive the Cook Islands Maori language, as this is where the largest population of Cook Islanders reside.

HEALTH

Free health care is provided to all students until the age of 18, and for all pensioners aged 60 years and above. Health services range from public health (inclusive of primary care) to secondary care. There is a shortage of doctors to maintain high coverage in the workforce, with a shortage of skilled nurses. Further challenges in the range of services offered include NCD's, such as diabetes, heart disease & obesity. These areas highlight the burden on our health care system. Medical care is often referred on to New Zealand.

From 2019-2020, life expectancy increased to 82 years for males and 86 years for females. These rates are positive and suggest that people are living longer.

The Cook Islands did not escape the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. International border restrictions meant that the Cook Islands suffered economically and socially. The Cook Islands have had only one death from COVID-19. Local Puna clinics provided accessible primary health care within the villages, with nurse practitioners onsite and doctors alternating between each one. Immunisation coverage rates for babies born in the last 2 years remain over the 90% threshold, continuing the trend over the last 10 years. Outreach programmes are implemented frequently to encourage parents and caregivers to immunise their children.

YOUTH

Young people are a vital part of any society, as the future of the country's social fabric, work force, and community. The transition from childhood to adulthood is an important time in life. The ages of 15-24 are when many are becoming independent adults. It is widely accepted that core value systems such as honesty, respect, custodianship and good citizenship assist young people in making good decisions about their education, social behavior, work and family life, which impact their future opportunities.

According to the 2016 Cook Islands census, there has been a decrease in approximately 200 youth since 2011, leaving just over 2,087 youth. This decline has been attributed to young Cook Islanders relocating for educational and work opportunities abroad. According to the 2019 Labour Force Survey, youth unemployment is at 3%, the highest across all age groups. COVID-19 severely impacted tourism, the Cook Islands largest industry and employer. Youth were the first staff to be released from employment. However, during this time the youth workers were monitored to ensure that available social protection assistance was received.

Church, sports and school are the greatest support networks for our young people through the Cook Islands, where they often turn for help and support. Challenges faced by our young people today are being judged, having low self-confidence, having self-esteem issues, managing stress and anxiety, dealing with peer pressure around smoking and drinking, healing from violence and cyber bullying, and overcoming obesity, poverty and suicidal thoughts.

The Cook Islands Youth Policy (2021-2026) set a goal to provide guidance to various stakeholder groups who are implementing agencies that engage with youth. As Cook Islanders "made wonderful by God," we know the importance of uniting to help and ensure that our youth are proud of their culture, traditions and identity. We will help them learn and develop, become healthy and resilient, and feel accepted, respected and connected.

CHILDREN

Child mortality rates in the Cook Islands have been declining over recent decades, and now have the lowest child mortality rates in the Pacific. However, the figures hide disparities within the remote outer islands with significantly higher rates of under-5 deaths. Good progress has been made in fighting vaccine-preventable diseases, with universal immunisation cover for 10 of the 12 recommended vaccines.

Highlighted as a barrier to children is the lack of an effective child protection system. Gaps in the legal framework correspond with a lack of specialised bodies and institutions to support child friendly justice systems. Challenges that leave children vulnerable to violence include attitudes and cultural traditions. This barrier prevents children from safeguarding their rights during legal proceedings. Gaps in protection of girls and boys requires further exploration.

WELFARE

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is the government agency responsible for payment of welfare benefits, which includes the Government Funded Paid Maternity Leave (GFPML) program.

Welfare payments are provided to the elderly, children and people with disabilities. There is no unemployment benefit paid in the Cook Islands.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government assisted and supported the Cook Islands residents, aided by the New Zealand government. These are some of the areas included in the responsive package: businesses (assistance with mortgages/loans), employees (wage subsidies), education (free courses), health (health packages), Te Aponga Uira (reduction in power rates). The New Zealand government also assisted with doctors and nurses to help with the crisis. A superb response was coordinated and implemented by the government to ensure that 96% of the population was successfully immunised against COVID-19. It was meticulously carried out and supported by dedicated health workers and volunteers from all walks of life.

ARTS & CRAFTS

WEAVING

Pandanus (screwpine) and *rito* (coconut leaf fiber) are the main natural fibers that women in the Cook Islands use for weaving. *Pandanus* is used to weave mats, baskets, hats, fans, and table mats. In the past, *panadus* was also used for covering the roof. *Rito* is very unique in our weaving, although a few other Pacific islands use it, too.

Rito is mainly used by women in the Northern Group Islands for weaving hats, fans, earrings, bags, purses, traditional costumes, and dance costumes. *Rito* comes from the coconut tree, which Cook Islanders call “the tree of life.” It’s the young, unopened creamy coloured center frond of a coconut tree. After being cut, it is split, boiled, dried, and uncurled. The preparation of the *rito* is one of the hardest parts. *Rito* hats is authentic and handmade. Each hat is unique, as the weaver who made it uses techniques passed down through the generations. It takes at least 5 days to weave a *rito* hat. *Rito* hats are worn by women to church on Sundays, to special occasions and functions, given as gifts to VIP delegates that visit, and are gifted for weddings and birthdays.

Ancient Cook Islanders used to weave *maka* (sandals), fishing nets, rope and eel traps out of *sinnnet* (a part of the coconut tree). This is a rare art form today.

EI KATU (head garland)

Ei katu is a garland of flowers worn around the head, and it is also known as a flower crown or head garland. *Ei katu* is made by Cook Islands women and young girls. It is worn by both females and males as a symbol of love and belonging. It is a circle, which means that everything is connected. Today, there is a high demand for these freshly made flower head garlands. They are worn daily as well as for special functions and occasions. They are also used to welcome family members, friends and VIP dignitaries to the Cook Islands. When presented as a gift, *ei katu* represents an embrace of love.

EI PUPU (shell leis)

Ei pupu are shell leis made on the island of Mangaia. These leis are very difficult to make. The process involves women spending long hours among rocks after rain showers, picking up little yellow snail shells. The shells are cooked and dried, then drilled with holes and threaded on a fishing line. The final product is a beautiful white and yellow *ei pupu* that is sold or given as a gift.

TIVAEVAE (patchwork quilts)

Tivaevae (also spelled *tivaivai*) is the art of making handmade patchwork quilts. It was introduced by missionaries' wives, and transformed into an art form that is celebrated throughout the Cook Islands. These are some of the methods used: *tivaevae taorei* (piecework/patchwork), *tivaevae manu* (applique), *tivaevae tataura* (applique with embroidery) and *tivaevae tuitui tataura* (embroidery squares of fabric joined together with either crocheting or lace borders). *Tivaevae* are used as bed coverings and or bedspreads.

Women gather in groups (*pange*), where they have a skilled designer (*taunga*). They choose a form of *tivaevae*, and each person is allocated a task. They meet regularly to complete each bedspread. It may take months or years to complete a *tivaevae*.

Tivaevae are special heirlooms in families, which are passed on or given as gifts during events such as weddings, birthdays, or traditional boys' hair-cutting ceremonies. They are given to grandchildren and special family friends. *Tivaevae* are often displayed with pride during important events.

Tivaevae eventually replaced *tapa* cloth, used by mothers with their babies. It is also used to cover or wrap loved ones when they pass on, as a final farewell.

CULTURE

The Cook Islands is a nation rich in history, culture and heritage. To commemorate the August 4th birthday of Cook Islands as an independent nation, an annual event is held, called the *Te Maeva Nui Festival*. This is a week-long cultural celebration of Cook Islands arts, crafts, music, song, dance and local food. Our people and culture are our greatest assets, and the whole nation comes to a standstill as we celebrate our unique culture during this festival.

The *Te Mire 'Atu* is an annual composers' song writing competition. The event celebrates indigenous song writing, and all gather to hear beautiful, traditional music sung in Cook Islands Maori.

The *Te Mire Ura* is an annual dance competition. The Cook Islands traditional dancing is considered the most sensual and lively dancing in the South Pacific. In a show of stamina and energy, the men provide the physical rhythm section with stomping. The women sway their hips and dance while creating images in the air with their hands. The dances tell traditional stories passed down through the generations and practiced rigorously since early childhood. Each of the inhabited islands sends its best dancers to compete in the various age groups.

The *Te Mire Tiare Festival* is a colorful annual flower festival that generates great excitement. It features competitions for the best florally decorated shops, schools and government buildings, each on a different day of the week-long festivities.

COMMON PHRASES USED IN THE COOK ISLANDS MAORI LANGUAGE

KIA ORANA – Hello, greetings.

**The literal translation is “May you live a long and fulfilling life.”*

AERE RA – Goodbye. This is said to a person who is leaving.

KA KITE – Farewell. Another way of saying goodbye to a friend

MEITAKI - Thank you.

KIA MANUIA - Good luck.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

The first service of World Day of Prayer (WDP) service was held on the island of Rarotonga in 1971. WDP was brought to the Cook Islands by the late Mrs. Akaiti Ama of the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), who also became the patroness for WDP Cook Islands for many years.

Because of the success and support from the people, a National Committee was formed with an ecumenical spirit, including the CICC, Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. In 1972, the service was held in the Seventh Day Adventist church in Avarua, Rarotonga, with a member of each denomination taking part. It was all conducted in the Maori language (Ama, A. Report: 1972). Since 1972, each church has taken turns in hosting the World Day of Prayer service, a practice that continues today.

In 1990, WDP Cook Islands formed a committee with a total of 13 women from 6 different denominations: CICC, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Assembly of God and the Apostolic Church.

Mrs. Rebecca Akaruru (from the Catholic Church) was nominated to attend the WDPIC International Meeting in Jamaica from July 28-August 6, 1990. At that meeting, Mrs. Akaruru was elected to be an alternate Regional Representative on the WDPIC Executive Committee for the Pacific region.

On Thursday, March 5, 1992, the Cook Islands celebrated the 21st anniversary of World Day of Prayer, hosted by the women of the Catholic church. A program was prepared (including a birthday cake!) to celebrate the occasion with members from all denominations in the Cook Islands.

In 2017, the Cook Islands was fortunate again when the late Mrs. Henrica Nio Marona was elected at the WDPIC International Meeting in Brazil to serve as the Pacific Regional Representative. She served in this role until her passing in 2021.

The number of attendees at WDP services has declined in the Cook Islands since COVID-19, but the spirit of prayer continues to be strong among those who participate. The WDP service continues to be an annual event in Rarotonga and the *Pa Enua* (the islands other than Rarotonga). Our current WDP Cook Islands committee organized a Writer Workshop in

August, 2022, to launch the writing process for the 2025 program. The group continues working together to prepare for upcoming programs, especially 2025. Women from every part of the Cook Islands have joined together to proclaim: “*WE ARE BEING MADE WONDERFUL!*”

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