

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 2025. Reflection by Rev. Cornelia Grant

Before we continue with our prayers of intercession, I would like to pause for a moment to have a look at the beautiful and vibrant picture of this year's liturgy. It was created by a mother and daughter team: Tarani Napa, a mother of six children, primary school teacher, entrepreneur and creative artist, who works together with her eldest daughter, Tevairangi Napa, also a creative artist and mother of two.

The Cook Islands consist of fifteen islands. Twelve are inhabited and scattered over nearly two million square kilometres in the Pacific Ocean. (In comparison, New Zealand from Cape Reinga to Bluff is about 2000 kilometres long).

The capital is Rarotonga, with just over 10,000 inhabitants out of a total of 15,000. Many Cook Islanders live abroad, - 80,000 in New Zealand and 20,000 in Australia.

Tourism is the main source of income, although too many tourists can put pressure on infrastructure and natural resources, e.g. water.

Cook Islanders have a high level of education. A survey in 2019 showed that 80.2% of the labour force had tertiary level education, male and female having the same level of achievement.

When it comes to health care, New Zealand could learn something. All students to the age of eighteen and all senior citizens over the age of sixty have free healthcare, but as is the case in New Zealand, they have a shortage of doctors and nurses. Immunisation rates for babies is 90%, and during the pandemic 96% of the population was immunised, with only one death recorded.

Flowers are an integral part of Cook Islands identity, worn as leis or a head crown. In our picture the flowers are like a crown at the top of the picture, underlined with a band of black pearls. Flowers are symbolic of love, friendship and respect. They also appear on their clothes and quilts.

Tivaevae, or quilt making, was introduced by missionary wives. It is symbolised by the big sailing ship at the top back of the picture, with the cross on the sail.

For quilt making groups of women come together regularly, each being allocated and working on a part of the quilt. When it's finished (after months or years), it is handed on at special occasions like birthdays and weddings, or ultimately used to wrap a dead body in all the love that went into making the quilt.

At the front of the picture, you see a group of women, each representing a special Cook Island craft.

The lady with the white hat is actually making a white hat. It is intricate work and takes five days to make one hat! These hats, as well as traditional and dance costumes are made from rito, - coconut leaf fibre. They are worn for church and other special occasions. Pandanus, or screw pine, is the other natural fibre used for weaving of mats, baskets, fans or table mats.

The lady in the middle is making leis and the third lady is stitching away at her part of the Tivaevae.

Giving them shade are coconut trees. For the Cook Islanders the coconut tree is "the tree of life". It is a symbol of strength and goodness. Each part of the tree is used, from the fronds to the deep roots, for food, drink, medicine, shelter, cooking and much more.

The people of the Cook Islands feel blessed by God, with all this natural beauty and abundance on land and in the sea surrounding them, and therefore sing happily, "I am, you are, we are wonderfully made", praising God.