



GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

New Zealand - Living and Sharing the Gospel

29 June 2016

FESTIVAL 2016 – NGONGOTAHA (27 September – 2 October)

Kia ora friends,

I am reminded by the recent passing of Shirley Cole, who was well known, respected and loved by a great many of us, that life is fleeting and that life's true centre concerns the strength and closeness of our relationships. Our lives are an opportunity, God-given and God-supported, to be grasped firmly and used wisely. Shirley did that, and despite failing strength and shrinking opportunity, was a shining witness and example of faithfulness to the end. She loved God, and it showed.

Each year the days we spend together at the festival provide not only the blessing of a wonderful time away from the challenges and hardships of our world, but the opportunity to strengthen and deepen the connections we have between each other and between congregations. It is the season that I look forward to with most anticipation for it too is an opportunity, God-given and God-supported, to be grasped firmly and used wisely. It is that time we set our hearts upon God and his will, and gather to be joined in fellowship and brotherly love. Enjoyable as the teaching and activities may be, it is the aroma of our connections that lingers longest, and is to be most treasured.

Again, we will gather in Ngongotaha at the Willowhaven Camp in the first week of the school holidays, beginning formally on Wednesday morning, 28 September and ending Sunday morning, 2 October. For those coming early or for set up, an informal supper is being provided on the Tuesday evening as a first chance to fellowship and catch up on the year just gone.

This year we have invited a special guest speaker from GCI Philippines, Dr Rey Taniajura, who with his wife June plans to spend the whole period with us and share their passion for God's work and experiences working in the Philippines and across Asia. Dr Taniajura is a long-time regional pastor in the Philippines, focused his Doctor of Ministries studies on Pastoral Ministry, and was for some time the local director of the Philippines Missions Association. He has had a long association with Prison Fellowship's work across eastern Asia and serves on their Philippine board, and currently also is the Philippine coordinator of Odyssey in Christ Ministry, facilitating spiritual renewal in the wider church. Dr Taniajura brings a wealth of understanding and experience.

As you know, we have a significant number of Filipino members now living in New Zealand, principally in the lower North Island (Taihape, Waipukurau, Masterton), who came to work in the beekeeping industry. That Dr Taniajura, whom they have long known and respect, can visit us this year will be a wonderful opportunity for them. They will catch up on the work being done in their homeland and provide us with a taste of their culture and approach in life. I was this past weekend at a cross-denominational combined service in Taihape that pulled in Filipinos from Taupo to Lower Hutt. It was a lively service, full of passion and desire to share their faith with others, and it struck me again how intimate and immediate they see their walk in Christ, for out of that came the two immensely encouraging testimonies we heard that day.

Indeed, in our personal experiences we all have stories to tell of God's hand guiding the paths we have taken and extending our impact into the world about us. Sitting with Shirley during her last days became just one such story; I was privileged to see God's hand working there. Her final moments were not spent in regret but filled with gratitude, expressed in moments of audible prayer. Those working around and with her heard it also, as did her granddaughter too. It is a story I will long reflect upon and undoubtedly retell when it seems appropriate.

Living and sharing the Gospel is the great objective our lives and ministry are focused on, and our time together in Ngongotaha will be shaped toward that. Our theme for this year is "Being Christ in Community." My hope is that something of the immediacy and intimacy of our daily walk in and with Christ, despite its seeming ordinariness, will settle into our hearts and stir them to fervency and thence intentional action.

And so, as we come together in fellowship, it isn't merely for companionship or a break away from life's issues that we gather, but to be stirred in spirit, encouraged and more firmly bound into this friendship we enjoy. These days are for sharing our stories of God's work in our lives, things we have seen, confirmations of Scripture observed, of how the Spirit has stirred us in heart and encourages us for the next portion of the journey. Stories are crucial to the work of the Gospel. We only know what life is because of stories. Stories breathe aliveness and movement for they are never static: they start in one place, move on to another and end in yet another. Life is a journey, and our life journeys are to glorify our Father in heaven.

For as many as can make it for the Tuesday, we will have an informal evening social/supper. Our formal programme, however, will begin the next morning with a song service and sharing the symbols of Communion. Our first full worship service will be that afternoon at 2:30pm and an offering will be taken up. Then each day thereafter services will be in the morning at 10:30am, with an offering being taken up on the final day also.

Enjoying activities together is always an important element of our festivals. This year we plan our annual seniors' lunch on the Thursday while our youth and their families enjoy their afternoon at another venue. The Friday evening has been set aside for our Family Evening, which this year will be prepared by our Wellington congregation. And on the Saturday evening we look forward to a pot luck barbeque together at the hall. Additionally, we have asked Dr Taniajura to make at least one presentation around the Philippine work and missions. There will therefore be some open spaces on the programme for private fellowship opportunities.

With the festival now barely three months away, please be praying that all elements still needing to be finalized will come together without hitches, and that the Taniajuras will have no difficulty obtaining the necessary visas from our government. I would also like to appeal that we add some extra to the Festival Fund since cost to bring the Taniajuras to New Zealand will exceed our normal budgeted festival travel expenses.

I look forward to seeing you again very soon! Blessings and best wishes!



Dennis Richards
Festival Coordinator

Incl.

- Festival registration form