

Remembering Pope Francis

When news broke that Pope Francis had died, it felt like a bit of hope had died as well. Francis's approach to life, relationships, and humanity has been the anchor for Catholic and non-Catholic alike in a world that is becoming increasingly more divisive, violent and authoritarian.

I use the analogy of an anchor to point out that through his many letters, encyclicals, speeches, and messages, we had something to cling to or secure ourselves as a point of reference and calmness of human dignity and resilience in a world that is becoming increasingly chaotic.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the publication of *Laudato Si* in 2015 provided new energy for many faith and interfaith groups engaged in highlighting mineral extraction and primary industry actions impacting the environment and vulnerable communities. *Laudato Si* action groups began to emerge across the interfaith spectrum, bringing people together in collective action for the environment.

Pope Francis also continually reminded the global Catholic community of the plight of the Palestinian people. Pope Francis's care and concern for the people of Gaza, their lack of freedom and rights, along with the ongoing invasion by Israeli military forces, have caused the death and destruction of so many. With regular reminders from Francis to pray for people of Palestine, the emergence of more prayers said at Mass specifically for peace and self-determination, as well as more protest actions happening here in New Zealand, on the other side of the world from the Holy Land.

Last but not least, Pope Francis also continued to raise the rights of Indigenous peoples and the plight that so many Indigenous and migrant peoples find themselves in. Māori King Tuheitia (1955 - 2024) visited Pope Francis in 2019, and their conversation was primarily on the rights and needs of Māori and Indigenous peoples. Pope Francis' encyclical *Querida Amazonia*, published early in 2020, also focused on Indigenous people's rights and needs. Pope Francis was always about building bridges through attentive listening and dialogue. He tried to reach out to everyone—a shepherd and a peacemaker. May he rest in peace.



Kingi Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero with Pope Francis in Rome, May 2019.

Source: Waikato Times <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/113027915/the-mori-king-has-met-with-pope-francis-in-rome>

Starting from our roots, let us sit around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes. In this way our differences, which could seem like a banner or a wall, can become a bridge. Identity and dialogue are not enemies. Our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves. (Querida Amazonia, No. 37).

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