

Mahitahi NZ Overseas Volunteer Service

A remarkable mission movement has flourished for decades in the New Zealand Church. It was long known as the “**Catholic Overseas Volunteer Service**” (**COVS**). Since 2002 the organization has been known as “**Mahitahi**” (Working Together).

The dynamic of mission has shaped church history in Aotearoa New Zealand since the time of Bishop Pompallier and the first Marists. The Poynton Family in the Hokianga took the initiative in calling for the first missionaries. Suzanne Aubert, and many others, later arrived on these shores as lay volunteers.

While New Zealand was perceived to be a mission receiving country, it was soon also a mission sending country. For a century and more an energetic missionary spirit gave every Catholic an understanding of what it is to be church. From early in the 20th century, Kiwi priests, religious and lay missionaries responded to invitations to assist overseas churches in every corner of the globe.

It is not surprising that a movement, first known as “**lay mission helpers**”, emerged in New Zealand at the time of the 2nd Vatican Council. Imagination was fired for participation in mission over the horizon, especially in places of need. New Zealand Catholics were keen to be part of the overseas mission scene in a new special way.

Credit for such imagination goes to the vision and energy of one woman, Jocelyn Franklin. She was a key figure in the development of the lay apostolate movement in Auckland, closely supported by Bishop (later Cardinal) Reginald Delargey.

The story of the Catholic Overseas Volunteer Service has been recorded by a former coordinator of the programme, Miriam Broad, in “**The Jewel in the Crown of Mission**”. It is a story of people developing their life-skills through the experience of sharing and learning in cross-cultural situations. Volunteers become ambassadors in a two-way exchange of giving and receiving.

It must not be forgotten that a collaborative spirit around mission possibilities is still needed in 2010. The satisfaction and success of **COVS** experience remains a hopeful basis for fresh partnerships and collaboration within **Mahitahi**.

***Mahitahi** is the official Catholic overseas volunteer sending agency, which seeks New Zealanders to enter into project partnerships with the communities of Oceania through the sharing of their gifts and skills. It recruits people with the appropriate expertise to work in jobs and projects alongside Pacific Island Partners, to assist them as they journey to achieving their goals.*

You are encouraged to browse through the current positions, check out the requirements, and contact the Director, Christina Reymer: www.mahitahi.org.nz