

MODERATOR'S MESSAGE

ANZAC DAY 2022



Where does the church stand?

The war in Ukraine is a chilling backdrop to ANZAC Day this year. As we remember the sacrifices made by New Zealanders and Australians who died at Gallipoli, we also think of all those who have served their country in times of war to ensure the freedoms we experience today, and we lament the brutal suffering of the Ukrainian people.

The place of the church in this space was heightened for me in the contrasting stances taken by church leaders in Russia. The WCC wrote a strong letter to Patriarch Kirill (Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church) encouraging him to use his influence to pressure Putin to end the war. His reply was disturbing; on the one hand a prayer for peace, on the other, justifying the Russian actions! Compare this with the response of 300 or so Orthodox priests who have come out in opposition to the war. They launched an open petition calling for an immediate ceasefire to the war with Ukraine and criticized the suppression of non-violent protests demanding peace. In the petition the priests and archpriests said they are each appealing personally "to everyone on whom the cessation of the fratricidal war in Ukraine depends, with a call for reconciliation and an immediate ceasefire."

Two responses, one disturbing and the other courageous! I think of other courageous responses from Christians over the centuries.

The lists of names of those who lost their lives in wars that are memorialised in churches around the country also represent the unnamed from these districts who served in wars, and those who fretfully kept the home fires burning. And we remember the courage of chaplains; I think of previous Church Moderator George Falloon, awarded the Military

Cross for exceptional bravery including one instance when he repeatedly went out alone some 400 metres over a reef in the Solomons in the presence of the enemy to recover the bodies of those killed.

Then there were the pacifists who were often influenced by Christian sentiment; I think of the New Zealand poet Basil Dowling, a man of good Christchurch Presbyterian stock, and the huge sacrifices he made to hold his pacifist views in the face of war. And there is the inspiration we draw from the actions of Christian leaders like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in standing against Hitler.

And so as we remember our hard fought freedoms this ANZAC day, we will also reach out to Ukrainians with our love and prayers. Let us give money to support those in need on the ground (Christian World Service has an appeal the PCANZ supports and endorses). Let us cheer on people like the 300 Orthodox priests who are showing Christian courage close to the action, the Ukrainian priests and ministers who have remained in Ukraine to minister to their people, and the churches of the surrounding countries who are involved in giving aid to refugees. And in our churches up and down this land we will pray!

We will pray for peace, for the conversion of those who make war - from hate to love, and that the harsh lessons learnt in our wars will not be forgotten so we stop this terrible cycle repeating.

Blessings

Hamish

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