

Bishop's Action Foundation – a history

By Virginia Winder

The story of the Bishop's Action Foundation is one of faith, trust and champions. To understand how this far-reaching community organisation began, it's necessary to rewind to 1842 when Taranaki was united under the Anglican Church.

Back then, the Bishop of New Zealand, George Augustus Selwyn, believed that one day Taranaki would have its own bishop.

What he couldn't know was that his vision would not be fulfilled for another 157 years.

Instead, in 1857, when the new Church Constitution was signed, Taranaki became divided. From Eltham southwards, the region was in the Diocese of Wellington and everything from Stratford northwards was in the Diocese of Auckland.

That line went clean across Taranaki, so that on the coast, Opunake was under the control of Wellington and Rahotu was in the Auckland area, says Taranaki Bishop Philip Richardson.

"So from very early on, Taranaki, united in every other sense – economically, geographically, historically – was divided by in terms of Anglican oversight," he says.

In 1926 when the Diocese of Waikato was formed, the northern half of Taranaki fell under its control, while the southern side remained with Wellington.

In the late 1980s, a move came from Stratford-born Bishop Brian Davis to have Taranaki under the jurisdiction of just one diocese. Before becoming the Archbishop of New Zealand, he had been the Bishop of Waikato and later the Bishop of Wellington, so had been on both sides of the divide.

Taranaki becomes united

Bishop Brian got together with his Waikato successor, Bishop Roger Herft, to talk about the best way of handling Taranaki. They established a joint commission and in 1996 wrote a report that recommended that a Bishopric of Taranaki be established and that it should secede from Wellington to come under the Diocese of Waikato.

That meant the diocese would have two bishops; one that would oversee Taranaki, while the other would oversee the rest of the diocese.

Between 1997 and 1999, all the appropriate steps were taken, including passing legislation in the General Synod (church parliamentary system) in 1998 to create the Bishopric of Taranaki and have the region become part of the Diocese of Waikato.

Bishop Philip says the new move was a little hard for the people of South Taranaki.

"There was some grief and sadness about leaving the Diocese of Wellington, which they had been part of for so long, [and there was] a bit of suspicion as to whether they would really be cared for well," he says.

But people could see the logic of it. "This is a very isolated province; it's very difficult for either Wellington or Hamilton to provide good oversight."

Nomination out of blue

In February 1999, at an Electoral Synod held in Stratford, Philip Richardson was elected as Bishop.

He was surprised by the move, mainly because he had had little to do with Taranaki, although he had long been moved by the story of Parihaka. This poignant piece of New Zealand history involves the 1881 invasion of the village and the peaceful protest movement of Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi, which inspired great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi.

At the time of his nomination, Philip Richardson was the Warden of Selwyn College at the University of Otago. He had been through some difficult years and was out the other side. “We had had to force change a pretty abusive culture there and it had become a very healthy community and academically a very strong community and so they were good years.”

Starting from scratch

On the home front, he and wife Belinda Holmes and their two children, Joshua and Clare, were settled and happy in Dunedin.

Also, Philip Richardson had been involved in high-profile work for the Anglican Church. “I was chairing a commission looking at the restructuring of theological education across New Zealand and Polynesia and I had been managing a piece of legislation through the General Synod,” he says.

“So I guess that is what brought me to the attention of the Waikato delegates at the synod and a couple of them became very committed to the idea that I should be the bishop.”

When first approached to be bishop, he admits being a bit offhand.

“I laughed to be honest, which was pretty rude on reflection, but I was in the middle of doing this two-day process, working this legislation through.”

But when the 40-year-old thought about the idea, he became enthused.

“There was something about the newness of what was being proposed; the fact that I would have an opportunity to lead something from scratch.”

Valentine’s Day bishop

Also appealing was the idea of working with the other bishop in the diocese, David Moxon.

But Philip Richardson simply didn’t expect to be elected believing his young age and the fact he’d been working academia for nearly nine years would count against him.

“But God had a different idea, I guess. So I was elected on 14 February 1999 – Valentine’s Day.”

On 10 July 1999, he became Bishop Philip Richardson at a consecration service at St Mary’s Church in New Plymouth.

It was a consecration with a difference and showed that Bishop Philip was a man prepared to break down barriers, all for the love of God.

His best friend from Dunedin, a Roman Catholic priest called Peter Morris, preached at the consecration.

This was believed to be only the second time since the Reformation that a Catholic priest preached at an Anglican ordination, he says.

The first was when Paul Richardson (no relation), who was consecrated at Madang, on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, in January 1987. The preacher at that service was Father Henry Barlage SVD, who went to become Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries.

Sharing the load

When Philip Richardson took over the Taranaki bishopric he was meant to be the Assistant Bishop to David Moxon, the Bishop of the Waikato Diocese.

However, Bishop David didn’t want an assistant, but a colleague of equal standing.

This meant the men co-chaired meetings and made joint decisions.

“As the diocese struggled to get their head around this kind of two-headed monster, he was just absolutely consistent. He would never make a decision without it being something we had jointly agreed on. And what we found was that it actually became a very healthy process because you just have a better chance of getting a good decision if you have to debate it through with someone.”

Bishop David also gave the younger man total control of Taranaki. When people tried to go over Bishop Philip's head on matters involving the bishopric, Bishop David wouldn't have a bar of it.

"He would just write back to them or ring them and say, 'I am not your bishop, Bishop Philip is, so deal with him'."

After nine years of working this way, the co-relationship was officially sanctioned by the Anglican Church.

A world first

In 2008, the General Synod passed legislation which formally established what is now called a Dual Episcopacy – two bishops as co-equals in the one diocese.

This is now part of the constitution of the Anglican Church in New Zealand and Polynesia. "It's the first time it's ever happened in the world," Bishop Philip says.

On the home front, it means that the position of a bishop in Taranaki is protected in perpetuity.

That's the basis of how Bishop Philip came to the region and it strongly links to the origins of the Bishop's Action Foundation.

When he was elected and came to Taranaki he found the cupboard bare.

"There was just enough money to pay my stipend and my expenses and a part-time secretary, but absolutely no resources whatsoever to take any kind of initiative."

After the first six months, Bishop Philip realised changes were necessary. "It became really clear to me that I could either simply be like a purple-shirted chaplain to the parishes and the schools and things in my oversight, or we had to find a way of releasing the resources that we already had and maybe accessing resources that we didn't currently have, if we were going to be effective."

Nothing ventured, nothing gained

It is here, that Stuart Trundle makes an entrance, although up to this stage he has been working behind the scenes.

The Venture Taranaki CEO says that before Bishop Philip came to Taranaki in July 1999, he had given a presentation to an Anglican clergy group about the regional economy and outlook.

"I took the view that it was an opportunity to perhaps challenge the Church around its view of its role in the 21st century," he says.

"In a way church structures are based on very historic models of community and haven't really evolved to the changing social patterns that you observe in modern communities," Stuart says.

The Englishman who has travelled the world, much of it on the high seas as a Navy officer, laid down the gauntlet to the group.

"I guess in overseas terms, many countries have learnt that actually Church can be an incredibly powerful mechanism for beneficial change and so in a way I decided I would challenge Church in Taranaki to say you have a leadership role to play in driving our region forward."

Vision to make a difference

When Bishop David visited the region, Stuart was asked to repeat the same presentation, which was a call to utilise the highly qualified management team within the Anglican Church in Taranaki and "to mobilise that energy and resource to actually make a difference in our community".

After Bishop Philip's appointment, Stuart invited him out for lunch and shared his vision.

Bishop Philip remembers the occasion. "He said: 'You've got an opportunity to offer some leadership regionally across Taranaki and you are uniquely placed to do that

because in a way you don't have any kind of political masters.' And that was quite an insight really."

Over a period of time, the bishop and the chief executive had regular get-togethers over coffee to discuss ways of making a difference in Taranaki.

This led to a meeting of stipendiary clergy, which Stuart organised to be held at Venture Taranaki.

Stuart sat in on the morning session, where the clergy talked about what was happening in their communities – the joys and challenges – and identified common needs and issues.

Team of champions

"At lunch time Stuart came up to me and he said, 'you know you've got a team of champions here, they're extraordinary ...but they are not a champion team. They don't function as a team. Just imagine how much more energy and how much more of a difference you could make if you were actually working collectively, rather than as a group of individuals'," Bishop Philip says.

Later in the afternoon, Stuart returned with a schematic diagram drawn up on a single sheet of paper. "And he said, I reckon what you need is some kind of entity, some kind of organisation, maybe a trust, that can provide you with the kind of resource and the kind of strategic creativity to look at the resources you have currently got, both in terms of personnel and buildings and all the rest of it and deploy them more effectively to contribute to the health and well-being of the communities of Taranaki'."

Bishop Philip could see the merits of the idea, but also the reality – no resources.

But Stuart was undeterred by a simple thing like money. "He was saying, if you get clear about the vision, if you can see what it is you want to achieve, the resources will follow."

Tapping into community

However, before committing to setting up an organisation, the men agreed it was necessary to find out what needs weren't being met in the community.

Using \$15,000 from an estate bequest and a further \$15,000 from Venture Taranaki, they commissioned researcher Dr Sharon Milne, from Massey University, to write a report.

She discovered there were hundreds of organisations offering some kind of community response or service – there were more than 100 in Waitara alone.

Bishop Philip says he was shocked by the number. "But even more so by what she unearthed, which was that something like a third of them fell over within three months."

The 2004 report, called the Bishop's Action Foundation: A Project of the Bishop in Taranaki, identified the need for one umbrella organisation to work with existing groups to build their capacity so they could effectively respond to the community needs they were set up to address.

About the same time, Bishop Philip and members of the clergy met with Louise Tester and Helen Begg from the New Plymouth District Council's strategy and policy team to talk about community consultation.

That meeting, which was initially booked for one hour, lasted for three and the council women were impressed with how well the clergy knew their communities.

Pieces fall into place

This led to Louise suggesting that Bishop Philip meet with the council's community development specialist Simon Cayley.

Slowly, the pieces and people who would be integral to the Bishop's Action Foundation were being put in place.

Next, Bishop Philip thought the scoping report was excellent, but he wanted feedback from people who weren't part of the process.

"I decided I really wanted people who wouldn't pull any punches to critique the research and critique the conclusions," he says.

Those sought for their views on the report were: Simon, Louise, Mark Poppelwell (social development manager for the Taranaki regional office of Work and Income), Jim Greenaway (former director of Anglican-Methodist Social Services in Auckland), and Hiko of Hope organiser Stephanie McIntyre (director of Downtown Community Ministry in Wellington).

As part of the feedback process, Bishop Philip had a three-hour meeting with Mark, Louise and Simon. "It was one of the most stimulating conversations I have ever been part of, because they were really excited by the report. They said this is absolutely necessary."

Give it a shot

They were also cautious, questioning whether or not the church would be neutral enough for such a role.

"But at the end of it they were saying, look someone has to give this a shot because the voluntary sector is going to be in crisis, if it isn't already," Bishop Philip says. The trio could see the need for an organisation and the report suggested a way forward.

"So I came away from that conversation hugely encouraged."

He also suggested that Louise, Mark and Simon be part of a reference group to help guide the foundation.

A couple of days later, Simon called Bishop Philip to share his excitement about the foundation's vision and to say he would like to be part of any future organisation set up.

With the report critiqued positively, the next step was to set up a trust. Stuart Trundle provided the draft of a trust deed and lawyer John Eagles, a senior partner at Govett Quilliam in New Plymouth, did the legal work.

Trust-worthy people

Next, Bishop Philip began approaching people he believed would make ideal trustees. In her report, Sharon had suggested these trustees be champions in the community. For about 12 months, Bishop Philip had written a list of about 25 names on his whiteboard and let them "marinate".

"They just stayed there and I gradually established a priority of that list," he says.

With trepidation, he approached these busy people to give up more of their time. All said yes.

Those original trustees were: Stuart Trundle, Bishop Philip, John Young (then chairman of Kiwi Co-op Dairies and director of the New Zealand Dairy Board); Mary Bourke (then long-time Mayor of South Taranaki); Jim Gibbons (general manager of Energy City Ford); and Gerald Bailey (former chancellor at University of Waikato). The deed for the Bishop's Action Foundation Charitable Trust was signed in April 2005.

A woman's touch

Mary Bourke, the only woman on the trust, says her journey to becoming part of the foundation began when she first met Bishop Philip during the floods of February 2004. "He was there providing pastoral care and I was there as mayor.

She needed a team of people to evaluate applications for flood relief and wanted an impartial person to oversee the process. “He agreed to fit that into his very busy schedule.”

The tables turned when Bishop Philip asked Bourke to be a trustee on the Foundation and she, humble at being asked, agreed.

He told her about the Foundation’s aims and she could see there was a need for such an organisation in the region but believed it “should be filling in gaps, rather than absolving existing agencies of their responsibilities.”

At the first trust meeting, Bourke felt even more humble when she learnt about the backgrounds of her fellow trustees and their long service to the church.

“Then they got to me, and I had to admit ‘I’m the most non-ecclesiastical among you’.”

Faith in funds

After securing the trustees, it was then time to seek funding for the organisation.

First stop for Bishop Philip and Stuart Trundle was to meet with the Finance Administration Council of the Waikato Diocese.

“We asked them to underwrite us to the tune of \$120,000 a year for three years and we put our case,” Bishop Philip says, admitting he wasn’t hopeful.

At the time, Gerald was chairman of the council and he asked the BAF trustees to leave the room. “They talked about it and they came back and they said, we’ll advance you \$100,000 – that’s the best we can do. And I thought, bugger.”

Bishop Philip says he was downcast about the \$260,000 shortfall because the trustees had worked out the budget with great care.

On the other hand, Stuart was delighted at getting \$100,000 and thanked the council.

“I spent three hours driving back feeling depressed and he was whistling away feeling obscenely confident,” Bishop Philip remembers.

Stuart explains his optimism: “I think it is fair to say I have been a great believer in that that if you have a strong vision and a faith ...somehow mysteriously the money will appear.”

Searching for a chief

So, with that initial funding in place, the trustees decided it was time to employ someone.

They advertised and received a great deal of interest. Four applicants stood out on paper, so were interviewed by Bishop Philip, Mary and Jim.

As part of the interview, they were asked to prepare a report on how the capacity of volunteer organisations might be improved in Taranaki.

“Simon’s was just extraordinary,” Bishop Philip says.

So extraordinary that he got the job and that report he wrote in one hour during his interview came to be the basis for Keystone Taranaki, one of the foundation’s most successful initiatives.

On July 7, 2005, he began as chief executive officer of the Bishop’s Action Foundation. This was not a glamorous start – he first began working in a workroom at the back of Bishop Philip’s house on Mangorei Rd.

Go forth and create

As its first employee, Simon was given the job to “make it real”.

“They (the trustees) pretty much said ‘go create it’.”

“The Diocese of Waikato had committed to underwrite \$100,000 and that was it,”

Simon says.

Now four years later, the Foundation has a building, a staff portfolio of seven people and a large array of work.

Simon says it was exciting starting an organisation. “The trustees had created a very clear vision and framework, but I was free to create the detail.”

Equipped with a strong background in community development, he started building the Foundation. His first move was to meet people and organisations around Taranaki with the aim of building relationships and partnerships.

“If I would highlight one thing about our success, it would be that,” he says of this first move. “I sensed, and I think I was right, I had to define who the Foundation was to all the other stakeholders in the region.”

He had to tell people in the community what the Bishop’s Action Foundation was going to do, what it was going to mean, how it was aligned to existing organisations and what value it was going to add.

Laying the foundations

As well as building networks, the Foundation also built itself a home. In March 2006, Tikituterangi House opened. It’s named after Taranaki kaumatua, The Reverend Tikituterangi Raumati.

“That was a sign that here we are as an organisation,” Simon says.

But to continue, the Foundation needed further funding because he knew the \$100,000 from the Anglican diocese was not going to last long.

He was also aware that he had to stick to the trust’s clear framework and not grab every opportunity, which could turn the Foundation into a conglomeration that made no sense.

“What we are doing maybe broad-ranging, but it’s all consistent and coherent,” he says.

The aims that Simon has ensured the foundation has adhered to are these:

- To develop innovative and relevant mission and ministry initiatives.
- To contribute to the development of leadership in both church and community.
- To contribute to community education, health and well being.
- To secure increased research capacity to underpin and inform the work of the Foundation and other organisation.
- To encourage informed contributions, in discussion of public issues and values.

On top of these, the Foundation has also been careful to fill gaps, rather than do work other organisations are already charged to do. Instead, it aims to help empower those groups to do their jobs more effectively.

Elation at major milestone

In line with this came one of the Foundation’s major milestones – securing funding for Keystone Taranaki, a capacity building programme for voluntary and community organisations in the region.

The funding for Keystone came from the Ministry of Social Development, which agreed to fund \$70,000 a year for three years.

“I remember being sat in my living room at home and getting a phone call from the MSD and being told we’d got that money,” Simon says.

“I was elated – I was relieved, excited, all of that – because it meant we would be here for another three years and we could respond to a need.”

Plus it was recognition that the Bishop’s Action Foundation had truly arrived. “It was a major Government agency and it was a real vote of confidence for what we could achieve,” he says.

The programme ran from August 2006 to 2009, and Simon says it achieved its goals.

“We supported a vast array of organisations to reflect on what they do and respond to areas they need to improve.”

A major role of Keystone Taranaki was to run a governance training programme. This helped people in community groups identify the responsibilities of a governing body and how to maintain an effective relationship with money and staff.

The programme also established peer support development. This has led to aligned organisations coming together to support each other.

“That’s our sense that we will not be around forever and a day to provide capacity building support,” Simon says.

A matter of timing

In July 2006, another milestone walked through the door – literally.

Deirdre Nagle arrived in Taranaki seeking work and was referred to the Foundation by the New Plymouth District Council.

Simon was hugely impressed by her community development experience, especially on the international stage, but says her timing wasn’t perfect.

“She came six months earlier than I anticipated,” he says. “I was not ready to employ someone, but I took a punt.”

He’s never regretted it. “That felt like we trebled our capacity... we were able to achieve so much.”

The fourth milestone came via a backhand compliment.

When Simon first started, he realised he needed support to develop the organisation, so he put together a reference group of people from within Taranaki and beyond.

Those on that group were: Taranaki – Mark Poppelwell (Work and Income), Barry Finch (Education Taranaki), Elaine Jamieson (Taranaki Cancer Society), Bill Macnaught (Puke Ariki), Danny Hall (WITT) and Jan Martin (South Taranaki District Council community services); National – Anthony Dancer (Anglican social justice commissioner), Alison Greenaway (Landcare Research) and Penny Eames (cultural well-being consultant), Liz Andrews (Diocese of Waiapu); International – Siobhan Brown (business and personal mentor/coach) and Ultan Russell (Diocese of Liverpool, UK).

‘You have done it’

These people offered critique and guidance, so Simon was sure the Foundation was heading in the right direction.

“I remember a meeting towards the end of 2007 when they said ‘we don’t think you need us anymore, you have done it. The Bishop’s Action Foundation is recognised as an important stakeholder. People know what you do and who you are’. We were there,” he says.

“That was huge for me.”

That reference group did close, but a few stayed on as members of Simon’s CEO reference group, while the influence of all those original members continues.

“Those reference group members became advocates for the Foundation – so that was huge in building our networks and relationships.

Following the Virtues

One of the organisation's early programmes was all about building relationships within the family.

When Simon found out that a family parenting support programme based on the Virtues Project™ was closing down due to a funding cut, he thought the Bishop's Action Foundation could help.

The Bringing Out the Best in You and Your Child course is taught by Angevahn, who says it teaches parents to bring out the best in themselves and their children.

"Parenting is all about who you are," she says.

The course runs one night a week for six weeks during term time and the venue changes.

Angevahn says that it's not just for parents who are having problems, but for anyone bringing up children. She says people could consider it in the same light as professional development – about every three years someone might need a bit of a booster.

For the love of learning

Another Foundation initiative has been to provide community development training in partnership with the Auckland University of Technology.

"Lots of people work in communities, but few of them have been trained in community development," Simon says.

"We went to AUT and said we wanted to develop a new course that covers the principles and practices of good community development."

But any study needed to be affordable, accessible in terms of time commitment and courses need to be run in Taranaki.

The upshot of this has been three papers, each entailing a five-day course, costing a \$980 each and being taught in New Plymouth by AUT's Dr Love Chile.

By the end of 2009, the Foundation will have put 37 people through the programme.

"You imagine the growth in capacity across these communities," Simon says.

Gateway to communication

A further Foundation project, the ICT Gateway, helps improve the information and communication capacity of community organisations.

Project co-ordinator Patrick Edwards helps these groups access affordable computer equipment, innovative hardware and develop robust ICT strategies.

Big organisations like the New Plymouth District Council and Taranaki District Health Board often upgrade their computers and phone systems and they lease their old systems out to community groups, Simon says.

The ICT Gateway projects helps in this process and offers technical advice in setting up systems.

Finally, the Foundation offers Seasons, a peer support programme for children aged 5 to 12 who are suffering grief and loss.

Worth the risk

Simon says these projects and the Foundation itself have come into being because of “lots of very interesting paths that have come together”.

“Is it serendipity, is it God’s work? It makes you think,” he says.

“Ironically, none of the staff are Anglican. We are a very adept community development team and that in itself shows where the priority of the Foundation is.”

For him, Bishop Phillip and the trustees, it’s about taking the church out of four walls of a building and into the community.

As far as they know, the Bishop’s Action Foundation is unique in New Zealand.

There’s a similar organisation in Liverpool, England, but that’s the only one Simon and his team are aware of.

“It’s been an exciting journey,” he says. “It was worth the risk all those years ago.”

And so continues the mission of the foundation, one of “empowering the office of the Bishop in Taranaki to respond and make a difference in the community”.

All this stems from the simple but powerful philosophy of loving God and loving others.

NOTE: this history covers the early years of the Foundation through to 2008-09. Further updates, milestones, memories and achievements are recorded in Annual Reports and through the Board reports of the CEO.