

BAF BISHOP'S ACTION FOUNDATION

Bishop's Action Foundation 2005–2025

Three men of faith watch over Ngā Hua, the meeting room at the Bishop's Action Foundation on the outskirts of New Plymouth.

Captured on camera at Ōwae Marae are the Foundation's three patrons – Sir Paul Reeves, Philip Richardson and John Sentamu.

Sir Paul, New Zealand's first Governor-General of Māori descent, was the Foundation's inaugural patron from 2005 until his death in August 2011.

His friend John Sentamu, the Archbishop of York and Primate of England, took up the role in early 2012 and remained until he retired from his Anglican Church leadership roles in 2020.

Since then Bishop Philip Richardson has been patron. Both he and Sir Paul have served as Archbishop and Primate of New Zealand.

That photograph of three smiling men captures a joyful moment of fellowship in the Foundation's history.

It's also a gentle reminder that the Bishop's Action Foundation is a faith-based organisation and that spirit is reflected in the name of BAF's headquarters.

In March 2006, Tikitūterangi House opened in its rural setting on Mangorei Rd.

The Foundation's home is named after Taranaki kaumātua The Reverend Tikitūterangi Raumati, the first Anglican Māori minister ordained in St Mary's Cathedral in New Plymouth, who later became an archdeacon.

The Bishop's Action Foundation was born in 2005.

Seeing Jesus in everyone we meet

Philip's idea for the community-focused entity was sparked by a small thought-provoking book called *Christianity and Social Order*, written in one weekend by the Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple. It was published in 1942.

"I dip into it all the time," says Philip.

"One of the things he said was the church should be the one organisation that lives entirely for those who are outside of itself."

In a short sermon of sorts, Philip outlines the Temple-inspired philosophy behind the Foundation.

“It’s not about how we can get people into our churches,” he says.

“It’s not about how many people come to Jesus this year, as laudable as that might be. It’s about how we see Jesus in everyone that we meet and how we see the creativity of God in everything that we engage in.

“And so, organisationally, the church is only a means to that kind of end. It’s about seeing the world in a different way rather than trying to make the world in our own image.”

“So I’m open to... the presence of God all around us and in everyone. I haven’t got a clue how many of the BAF team are card-carrying Christians – I don’t really mind or care. It’s not the issue.

“It’s, do they look at the world with a sense of gratitude? And through that lens of gratitude, want to ensure that, everyone can live a life as fulfilling and as flourishing as possible.”

Philip says the staff are focused on helping others thrive – as are the trustees.

“We had just a stunning start-up trust board, and an exceptional CEO, and one year’s funding. And so there was something about the sharpness of that edge that meant we were pretty creative.”

Gathering trustees to take action

Mary Bourke was one of the people Philip “shoulder tapped” in those early days.

As the Mayor of South Taranaki, a role she held from 1992 to 2008, Mary had gained a reputation for practical thinking and strong community leadership.

Her path into the Bishop’s Action Foundation began during a time of crisis.

Soon after Philip arrived in the region, Waitōtara was struck by floods and a fund was established to help affected residents.

Mary organised a group to distribute the money and remembers seeing the new bishop turn up at the Waitōtara pub to check how people were faring.

“I thought, ‘oh, good on you’, and so I asked him if he would be on my team of people to distribute the funds.”

Not long afterwards it was Philip’s turn to ask for help, this time with the aim of forming a regional foundation.

“I said to him, ‘I don’t think I’m ecclesiastical enough to be on this’, and he just had a little giggle and said, ‘sometimes the least are the most’,” she says.

Her response was swift.

“I just thought, I can’t say no really, I have to be in,” says Mary.

“I was involved right at the very beginning, and, basically, he (Philip) shoulder tapped a group of people, and we helped with the formation of it.”

Two decades later she is still there.

The founding trustees were Philip (chair), Mary, Stuart Trundle (then CEO of Venture Taranaki), John Young (then chairman of Kiwi Co-op Dairies and director of the New Zealand Dairy Board); Jim Gibbons (general manager of Energy City Ford); and Gerald Bailey (former chancellor at University of Waikato).

From Assistant Bishop to Archbishop

While creating and leading the Foundation as the trustees' chair, Philip's role in the Anglican Church morphed and grew.

He was appointed to Taranaki in 1999, taking on the role of Assistant Bishop of Waikato in Taranaki after the region's southern parishes shifted from the Diocese of Wellington into Waikato.

In 2008, the diocese adopted a model unique in the Anglican world, with two bishops sharing one jurisdiction. Philip and David Moxon became co-diocesan bishops.

"It was a very unique model. And it worked very well, I think, principally because of the very solid relationship between the two of us."

They shared leadership of the diocese until Moxon stepped down at the end of 2013 to take up a role in Rome.

For a year, Philip led the diocese alone, before Helen-Ann Hartley was elected to the co-diocesan role. She focused on Waikato and he on Taranaki, until the end of 2017, when funding constraints meant the model could no longer be sustained.

Mary steps up

Alongside that work, Philip became Archbishop of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia in 2013, a role he held for about a decade, finishing in mid-2024.

During that time, the demands of the role saw him step back from chairing BAF.

"I sort of ended up stepping up into being the interim chair for a number of years... it freed him up a little bit," says Mary.

He moved into the patron role instead, remaining closely connected while easing his workload.

Philip also knew the Bishop's Action Foundation was in good hands, as it had been from the beginning.

Recognising the need for strong leadership, the trust advertised for a chief executive officer, and asked applicants to prepare a case study to show how the Foundation might work.

CEO applicant writes BAF's blueprint

Simon Cayley's effort was a standout.

"Simon went away and wrote the whole kaupapa in 45 minutes or so. It was magnificent," says Mary.

The ideas he wrote during that interview became the blueprint for the Foundation.

"That one page really founded BAF's commitment to helping other not-for-profits," she says.

"He's been there ever since and he's just as motivated now as he was then. He's been an amazing resource, both for us, but particularly for the region."

Mary believes part of the organisation's strength lies in the way it approaches problems.

"The Bishop's Action Foundation doesn't do knee-jerk reactions," she says. "If a need is perceived, we establish that it's real before we go any further."

That has included employing researchers to look deeply into issues and needs.

The number of staff has gone up and down because of funding, demand and the call for BAF's services.

Over the years the Foundation has worked quietly, almost invisibly, alongside communities throughout Taranaki.

Wheelhouse seen as flagship model

One initiative Mary points to with particular pride is the Wheelhouse, which started as Keystone and evolved into the service it is now. It provides governance support and practical advice for community organisations.

"It's a classic example of Simon recognising a need and building relationships with the appropriate people," she says.

"That's a flagship model, which doesn't exist in a lot of other regions," says Mary, who knows people outside Taranaki are envious of what BAF's created.

"Communities are the best designers of the solutions to the problems that they face. We don't have to take a one-size-fits-all approach that somebody in Wellington with a highfalutin degree has designed for us with no knowledge of what it's actually like on the ground here."

Wheelhouse manager Jo Weise says the service was created to support any community organisation, including sports clubs, youth groups, social services, environmental entities, radio stations – and more.

Guidance from the Wheelhouse helps groups lead and govern well and keep going when resources are tight. That help comes in many forms.

Hub for learning and connections

"We are a bit of a hub, so people come to us and we connect people, we provide resources, we train, we help people to perhaps decide on how they might go about things and direct them to specific things."

Jo says that often the people who walk through the door arrive with energy, enthusiasm and their own expertise, but can feel stuck about what to do next.

Governance and leadership can be some of the hardest parts.

"You hop in with a real passion and an interest and a capability, but you're not necessarily a jack of all trades," she says. "Even accessibility to training is an issue if you're a small organisation."

Community groups, many run with volunteers, want to know if or how their people can upskill with little money and time.

The Wheelhouse concept took shape over coffees and conversations between Simon Cayley from BAF, Maria Ramsey from the TSB Community Trust and Leighton Littlewood from the New Plymouth District Council in 2011.

They saw groups bringing experts into Taranaki to build skills, but others, who could have benefited, were missing out because they heard too late.

Andrew Brock, who joined the Bishop's Action Foundation in early 2012, helped start the Wheelhouse programme.

That meant writing the first manuals, helping create the website and putting it all together.

Glue holds society together

"I fundamentally believe in the strength of community," says Andrew. "Then it requires us to support those people to have the skills and the resources and the access to things that will help them achieve and make our communities really positive, good places."

Andrew has remained involved with the Wheelhouse since those early days and continues to deliver workshops to groups needing support.

He's also a sounding board for the manager. "I'm one of the people who Jo can lean into just to ask questions or test things."

From the beginning, the work of the Wheelhouse has been about responding to concerns and issues facing organisations – and planning for the future.

"However, the other part has actually always been about looking ahead and trying to see what is going to be coming into the sector."

The Wheelhouse itself has evolved over the years, supported by a number of partners and leaders.

One of the key figures in its development was Marcia Millard, who managed the programme for six and a half years and helped strengthen relationships throughout Taranaki.

The Wheelhouse work reflects something many people overlook.

"The glue that holds a lot of our society together is what communities are doing in their own right," Andrew says.

"If we want good, strong communities, we need to be able to support them."

Trestle table beginnings

When Simon Cayley began the role in 2005, the Foundation itself was little more than an idea.

"We essentially were given a vision and purpose statement, a trestle table and up to \$100,000 and basically given the task – see what you can do with that."

As mentioned, one of the first initiatives to emerge was Keystone Taranaki, a fledgling programme that became the Wheelhouse.

"What we were trying to do was make something that was accessible and affordable," says Simon. "A lot of the early sessions were run by people in the region who had lived experience to share."

Over time, a constellation of partners formed around the Foundation.

The early stars were the TSB Community Trust (now Toi Foundation), district councils, Sport Taranaki, Te Puni Kōkiri and the Department of Internal Affairs.

Simon describes BAF's role in those partnerships – and other programmes – as deliberately light.

“A little bit of BAF can make a significant difference – too much of BAF is probably unhelpful.”

Rather than directing projects, the Foundation brings people together to lead their own initiatives.

“People and organisations have lots of skills and life experience that sometimes just needs connecting,” says Simon.

Sometimes those connections have led to entirely new initiatives, like the ICT Gateway, a social enterprise helping community organisations keep up with technology while generating income to sustain its own work.

Seasons for growth

One programme with longevity focuses on care and support for young people, aged 6 to 18.

“Our Seasons programme has been with us since the beginning,” says Simon.

Delivered in small, age-appropriate peer groups, it supports young people as they navigate grief and loss – from bereavement and illness to family separation, imprisonment, foster care and migration.

Held over eight weekly sessions, trained volunteer companions guide them through a structured journey, helping them explore their feelings and build ways to cope.

Seasons reaches across Taranaki and into the Waikato, walking alongside a significant number of people over 20 years.

In 2025, Seasons supported 298 children and 20 adults across 82 programmes, with help from an active pool of 61 trained volunteer companions.

Youth home born from question

Another initiative aimed at young people, aged 16 to 21, is the Manna Youth Home at Ōakura.

It began with a question about what comes next.

“We were approached by Manna Healing Centre trustees to say, ‘can you help us create a new future for this place that was gifted, so that it continues to give back?’” says Simon.

BAF’s response was measured and methodical.

“We didn’t just make it up; we went out and spent nine months researching what was needed.”

What emerged was a youth transition home, shaped around the needs of young people navigating some of life’s hardest moments.

“It’s about supporting young people, disadvantaged young people, to frame a pathway towards independence,” he says.

That pathway is practical and personal.

“It’s about taking a young person at a vulnerable time in their life and wrapping around them the skills they need to give them a good shot at independent living.”

Manna is also installing two tiny homes for rangatahi to live in. There will be just one person per home, enabling them to build up a renting profile to help them secure a home or join a flat in the community.

BAF's approach to programmes and projects is the same as the aim for the youth at Manna. "It is about them being independent but still connected."

Building flourishing mentor programmes

New Horizons Aotearoa was another programme for rangatahi, which began in 2015. The idea, introduced by Kere Ell, saw students from Year 7 to Year 10 working with mentors on group building projects. The programme finished up in 2025.

Simon says the Foundation's trustees and staff, constantly ask: "What do we do well?"

His answer, in line with the organisation, is: "Be a catalyst for change. We can help things flourish that might not otherwise."

They have even assisted a group called Flourish Taranaki, a community collaboration that makes parenting a little bit easier. The charitable trust's deed was created in July 2020.

The BAF team wraps around organisations, supporting their needs, and using the skills the Foundation's team has to offer.

Mentoring has long been part of BAF's mahi.

"We were a founding partner of what's become the Mentoring Foundation of New Zealand," says Simon.

While it began as community mentoring, right from the start this initiative was forward thinking and far reaching.

Simon says programme focused on building something that could, over time, strengthen leaders and communities.

It started in Taranaki and grew into a national entity – now far beyond BAF.

"These things that are out there, flourishing and lasting beyond us," he says.

That was always the intent.

"BAF will put as much of us in as is needed, but it won't try and take away the focus on the people and the organisations themselves."

"What we've then done is pulled ourselves back, allowing organisations to thrive."

Legacy from the land

As well as its community work, the Foundation helps guide a legacy from the land.

In 2008, BAF took over trusts left by two South Taranaki farmers.

Claude William Nicholls, who died in 1954, and James Dawson Bashford, who died in 1962, left their rural estates to support future generations.

Both originally hoped their farms would train boys, but when that proved unworkable, sharemilkers were put on the properties and the proceeds were used for agricultural and veterinary scholarships.

In 2003, the criteria for both trusts was altered to allow females to apply for scholarships and, in 2016, the two entities were amalgamated, becoming the Bashford-Nicholls Trust.

BAF trustees continue to administer the farm-founded trust, allocating scholarships and grants to people training in land-based fields, including environmental subjects.

Craig Hattle, one of the Bashford-Nicholls trustees, joined the BAF board in May 2020.

With a farming and soil science background, he now works as a professional director, chairing several organisations including PKW Farms, Carefirst and Edison Consulting Engineers.

Honouring kaitiakitanga – guardianship

His governance work is shaped by a philosophy he has developed over many years in business and international development.

“We were called not to be owners, but to be stewards,” he says.

That idea of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) is central to the Bashford-Nicholls Trust, which shares trustees with BAF and continues to support generations of students as they enter ethical land-based careers.

“Everywhere I turn, I bump into somebody in agricultural circles who, somewhere along the line, got funding from Bashford-Nicholls,” he says.

“It has to contribute to the long-term prosperity of Taranaki.”

In November 2025, the Trust’s funds, worth \$14.5 million, were transferred to Taranaki Foundation, a philanthropic organisation, to be invested and managed by local experts.

The Bashford-Nicholls Trust now distributes about \$300,000 a year in grants.

Craig sees the partnership as an opportunity for the region’s philanthropic future.

“The partnership allows the trust to become the base for a major new pou for attracting and inspiring future legacy giving in the region.”

A legacy that has deep roots in the land and high hopes for the future.

“And for young people that come into farming, it's more than learning how to grow grass and milk cows. It's about understanding the natural system, looking after it,” he says.

“Many young people will come to farming through an environmental science degree and agricultural students will learn the natural way of the land,” says Craig.

Foundation sticks to purpose

Bishop Philip Richardson offers thoughts on the lay of the land – the shape and direction of the organisation.

Looking back over 20 years of the Bishop’s Action Foundation, he doesn’t immediately point to projects or programmes.

“I think if I had to name one, it's not so much any one of the kinds of myriad contributions that the Foundation’s made to wellbeing and community health,” he says. “It's more been the way in which... the Foundation has stuck to its purpose, which is not to be a provider of service, but an enabler of other people's good ideas.

“Mostly, it's been about the good idea, the response to a community need, the development of the strategy to address that or to support the good idea, the work around the sustainability of that.”

And, crucially, knowing when to step away.

“Part of that sustainability has been to ensure that it can stand on its own feet.”

Philip says there are a handful of exceptions, including the ICT Gateway and the Seasons programme. “...they've remained closer to the mothership.”

Always working for others

But even those are shaped by the same philosophy that underpins BAF: “To create an organisation whose primary purpose was to ensure the sustainability of others.”

He points to one example that embodies that: “Wheelhouse... is probably the best example of the core purpose and character of BAF because it is genuinely about empowering individuals, groups, communities, to respond to the needs they identify in their own midst.”

Other work, like the Manna Youth Home, tells a different kind of success story, one about innovation, research, respect and hard work.

It involved working with existing trustees and exploring a range of options. “And in the end settling on this very significant need of a transitional community for young people needing to be resourced to be self-sufficient and independent.”

With Manna, BAF took an existing model and completely repositioned it.

For Philip, that willingness to reshape and reimagine shows the Foundation's maturity as it asks: “Can we take the folk who have committed a good deal of their lives to one really good idea... and lead them to... recommit to a new direction?”

Reflecting on two decades of BAF, he says its impact has gone beyond what he first imagined.

“It has well and truly exceeded my expectations.”

BAF's DNA is to give away

He says that against a backdrop of a world moving away from a “more inclusive, more egalitarian, more fair society and community”, BAF's work stands out.

“If I had to characterise it, I would say that part of its DNA is being an organisation that gives itself away – it tries hard to make itself redundant. That's the bit that I haven't seen replicated anywhere else,” he says.

“If there is no longer a need for that kind of contributor, then we'll have a really good party and be thankful.”

Until then, the work continues.

“I think encouraging individuals and groups within communities to have agency over their own solutions should always be part of what the Church offers into community.”

Philip believes that more than anything, the success of the Foundation lies with the people behind it.

“I just feel very, very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such exceptional people,” he says.

And two of those, Sir Paul Reeves and Archbishop John Sentamu, are captured on camera sitting either side of Philip at Ōwae Marae at Waitara.

The photo of the three patrons hangs on the wall of Ngā Hua, the Foundation’s meeting room, as a gentle but constant reminder of BAF’s faith-based origins, dating back to 2005.