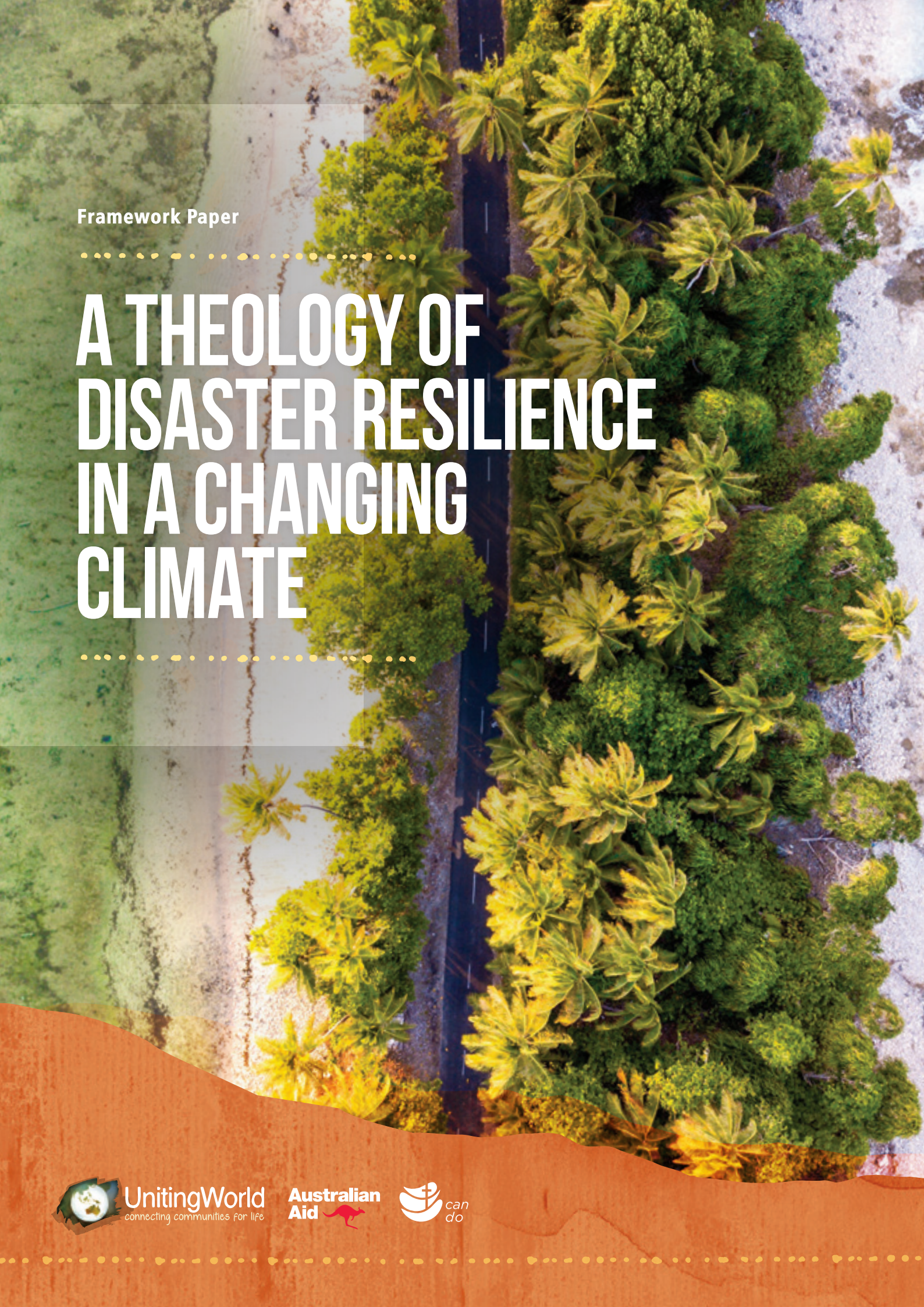


Framework Paper

A THEOLOGY OF DISASTER RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

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BACKGROUND

CORE STATEMENT: PREPAREDNESS IS AN ELEMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR A RESILIENT PACIFIC EARTH COMMUNITY

The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord. The world and its people belong to him. (Psalm 24:1)[1]

In August 2018 ten theologians and practitioners from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Aotearoa and Australia met in Suva to explore and consider what a context specific theology of Disaster Risk Management might look like for the Pacific. Prior to the group meeting baseline surveys were conducted in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu with church leaders, communities and other stakeholders by independent consultant Alice Banfield.[2] The purpose of the baseline surveys were to provide data to inform the theology of Disaster Risk Management and to test the assumption that theological beliefs underpin people's responses to natural disasters, climate change and the environment.

Drawing from the baseline survey results carried out by and through intense robust theological discussions over the week the following core statement emerged: *Preparedness is an element of discipleship for a Resilient Pacific Earth*[3] *Community*. It was agreed that this statement will frame the development of the framework paper and the accompanying bible studies. The theological notion of Preparedness is understood here to underpin the four stage cycle of the Disaster Risk Management process: mitigation, preparation, response and recovery. As churches, and as part of our active discipleship and custodianship of creation and the resources available to us, it is our responsibility as Christians to be prepared to respond to and mitigate the impact of disasters. Preparedness does not mean a lack of trust in God. In James 2: 17 & 26 we are reminded that *'faith by itself, if it has no works is dead'*. We are required to pray, discern and act. Preparedness embodies prayer, discernment and action and is to accompany the four stage cycle of the Disaster Risk Management process.

It was also agreed that rather than using the terminology of Disaster Risk Management that the more positive term of Disaster Resilience should be used here. It was argued that Disaster Resilience better conveys and reflects the strength and ability of Pasifika people and communities to mitigate, prepare, respond and recover from disasters.[4] A Christian understanding of Preparedness was identified as the basis for Disaster Resilience. In practical terms, the resilience of Pasifika communities is grounded in faith and trust in God and strengthened by reengaging and reclaiming the traditional wisdom of our elders in their ability to relate, read the weather patterns and live in a respectful and mutual relationship with the environment while embracing new technologies such as mapping and warning systems.

The theological resources (framework paper and bible studies) are a practical response to the questions and challenges of understanding why natural disasters happen, of where and whether God is present in suffering, our relationship with God within Creation and our responsibility and response to God's Sovereignty through our ongoing discipleship in sustaining and maintaining, in this instance, a Resilient Pacific Earth Community.

This framework paper is a collaborative document of the initial working group that met in Suva in August 2018. The paper was further strengthened by the insightful comments, suggestions and additions made by the many people within the CAN DO Disaster Ready project Church network in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Australia. Every attempt was made to incorporate and integrate the suggestions made wherever possible, relevant and appropriate. The final version of this paper has been shaped by the many voices that have contributed to it.[5] These voices are reflected throughout the text, and the ideas and thoughts captured in the paper. It is envisaged and encouraged that this framework paper will continue to grow, develop, strengthen and evolve as the theology of Disaster Resilience is lived, practised and tested in the years to come.

It is our collective prayer that the resources will bring about the changes in attitudes and behaviours around disasters that will in turn bring about transforming and transformative change in our local communities and beyond.

Finally, it has been my special privilege to be lead writer in this collaborative endeavour. I thank the Theology of Disaster Resilience Working Group for their wisdom, their commitment, their passion and their time and also for the many voices and perspectives beyond the Working Group that have all collaborated in the development and shaping of the framework paper.

Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll
on behalf of the Theology of Disaster Resilience Working Group.



1 All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless specified otherwise.
2 Four individual reports of the countries surveyed were complied by Alice Banfield under the titles "Theology of Disaster Risk Management: Baseline Study: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu." Sydney: Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO), 2019.
3 The inclusion of the term 'earth' in the core statement signifies a commitment to reconnect Pasifika understanding of 'community' as interconnected and inclusive of creation and people.
4 Resilience also better captures the implications for pre- and post planning and continuing community recovery planning and has positive, enabling and empowering implications. The concept also integrates a theological or faith perspective that is grounded in the resurrection.
5 Particular thanks to Pastor Talemo Ratakele Cakobau, Director Family Life, Sabbath School & Personal Ministries, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Suva, Fiji for extensive comment on the Framework paper, some of which is included in the final version of this paper.



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INTRODUCTION: SIN, SUFFERING AND DISASTERS

1.1 CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DISASTERS

Disasters often raise questions about God and the meaning of life. People ask questions such as: Why has this happened? Is a disaster God's punishment for sin? Why would an all-powerful, loving God allow disasters to happen? Where is God when disasters happen? Has God abandoned us? These are questions that have been raised and debated by theologians and philosophers for many centuries. At the heart of these questions lies the fundamental question about the nature and character of God. What then can disasters teach us about God, our relationship with God, our relationship with God within creation and our relationship with our fellow human beings?

Disasters come in many different forms. Disasters are both natural and human caused. Some disasters are beyond our control while some can be avoided. Disasters can be natural catastrophes that cause great damage including loss of life such as cyclones, tsunamis, floods, bushfires, etc. It can also be an event that has unfortunate consequences such as a car accident, a burnt house, etc. Or a disaster can be in the form of a failure of a business, or village leadership or a breakdown in a relationship or marriage. Nevertheless, disasters, natural or otherwise remind us of several truths: life is short, we are frail, and death is certain. But in all that we face in life, God is faithful and the one truth remains – *'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us' for nothing can 'separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'* (Romans 8: 37-39).

1.2 THE BIBLE AND DISASTERS

The bible records many kinds of different disasters. Some disasters are declared as God sent or divine judgement for sin (Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues on Egypt). Often these disasters occur for a specific reason and after several warnings have gone unheeded. The bible also records many other disasters in which there is no claim on God having caused them such as the famines noted in the stories of Abraham, Elijah, Joseph, Naomi and Ruth, and David. The bible does not claim that the hand of God is responsible for every disaster.[6] Sometimes the bible gives an explanation for disasters, at other times it does not. We may never know why something happened. Consider Job and the Psalms, the question of 'why?' is asked but no answer is given. Similarly, Jesus cry of abandonment on the cross 'my God, why have you forsaken me?' is not met with an answer but silence. The bible does not provide easy explanations for the causes of disasters or suffering nor guarantees that God will remove or prevent suffering. Instead, the bible speaks of faith that offers confidence that God can be trusted in the midst of suffering even if much remains unclear and uncertain.[7] This trust is based on God's character – that God is loving, faithful, compassionate and just.

1.3 IS SOMEONE OR A PARTICULAR GROUP TO BLAME?

The baseline surveys[8] conducted in Fiji, Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands and Vanuatu identified that disasters were viewed by most as Divine Retribution. In some cases, certain groups are specifically blamed. For example in Vanuatu, 'people blamed the elders for creating the disaster. They said they were disobedient, not carrying out their responsibilities in the community'.[9] The idea that a disaster is caused because of a particular person or group's sin or wrongdoing is not new and neither is it particular to the context of the Pacific. A Christian pastor viewed the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey as 'God systematically destroying America' out of anger over the 'homosexual agenda'.[10] The fact is *'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'* (Romans 3:23). We cannot make the assumption that sickness, injury, death or disaster is God's judgement for a specific sin. In Luke 13:1-5 Jesus, after being told by those present about a group of Galileans killed by Pilate, asks whether they were worse sinners than those people killed by the tower of Siloam falling on them. Jesus answers with a very clear, No! Jesus implies that people are killed or injured by disasters by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In John 9:1-3, Jesus is asked whether the cause of the man's blindness is his sin or his parents? Jesus replies that neither the man nor his parents sinned but rather *'he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him'*. Dwelling on God's wrath as a cause of disasters is not helpful and neither does it reflect or do justice to God's immeasurable love, mercy, and compassion embodied in Jesus Christ. We need also to understand and practice God's kindness and mercy. For 'in times of crises and distress, it is kindness and mercy that require us to reach out to those who need comfort and assistance'.[11] The parable of the Good Samaritan prompts us to look beyond our constructed prejudices to the dignity of our neighbour whom God calls us to minister to in a Christlike manner. Jesus concludes the parable of the Good Samaritan by commanding his listeners to *'Go and do likewise'* (Luke 10:37).

1.4 CHRISTIANS ARE NOT IMMUNE TO SUFFERING OR DISASTERS

Christians are affected by disasters as much as anyone else. *'For God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous'* (Matthew 5:45). Christians are as exposed to the joys and challenges of life like everyone else. Bad things happen to good and bad people alike (Psalm 73:3-5, 14). Christians have the hope of the kingdom of heaven, where there is the promise of no more death or suffering, where things will be restored to the way God intended, but until that time we live in the world and therefore suffer the consequences of human disobedience along with the rest of creation.[12] But this does not mean a passive acceptance of suffering as unavoidable. The bible does not claim that suffering should be accepted without protest. The Psalms are an example of lament and protest in the midst of deep despair and suffering. We are assured of the promise of God's presence through Christ, who experienced the depths of suffering and whose resurrection gives us hope of the future that is to come.

We may not be able to control natural disasters but we can control our response to these events. For many, surviving a natural disaster means more than losing material possessions; it means losing loved ones. Under such circumstances, it may seem difficult to experience joy while facing such devastation, but feeling

6 For an excellent overview of varying Christian responses to disasters see Dónal P. O'Mathúna, "Christian Theology and Disasters: Where Is God in All of This?." In Disasters: Core Concepts and Ethical Theories. Advancing Global Bioethics, edited by Dónal P. O'Mathúna, Vilius Dranseika and Bert Gordijn, 27-42. (Switzerland: Springer, Cham, 2018).

7 O'Mathúna, "Christian theology and disasters…", 40.

8 Four individual reports of the countries surveyed were complied by Alice Banfield under the titles "Theology of Disaster Risk Management: Baseline Study: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu." Sydney: Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO), 2019.

9 Alice Banfield, "Theology of Disaster Risk Management Baseline Study: Vanuatu". Sydney: CAN DO, 2019.

10 Matthew Schmalz, "Christian faith doesn't just say disasters are God's retribution", *The Conversation,* 7 September 2017, https://theconversation.com/christian-faith-doesnt-just-say-disasters-are-gods-retribution-83288

11 Schmalz, https://theconversation.com/christian-faith-doesnt-just-say-disasters-are-gods-retribution-83288

12 See resource by Paul Venton, and Bob Hansford. Christian Perspectives of Disaster in Our Communities. Tearfund Roots Resources. edited by Rachel Blackman: (n.p., Tearfund, 2006): 9-14.

joy in the face of suffering is not to deny pain. Suffering and joy are part of the human cycle of life. Peter's letter to the diverse community of people scattered throughout the five provinces in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1) who were persecuted because of their faith, encouraged them saying *'In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.'*(1Peter 1:6) Paul is another great example. While Paul did not face tornados, hurricanes or earthquakes, the list of his personal trials is quite extensive (see 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10). At the end of his list of trials, Paul concludes with the phrase *'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.'* By expressing joy in the midst of crisis, Christians glorify the Lord, encourage one another, and point the lost to hope in Christ. In this sense, disasters, however painful can be a time and an opportunity for new possibilities, renewal, and transformation. In faith we can claim in bold confidence that *'we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose'* (Romans 8: 28).

1.5 DISASTERS: A CONSEQUENCE OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

In Genesis 1, God created a beautiful world and was very pleased with it. Everything worked in perfect harmony. But human sin entered the world through the introduction of human beings who choose to live and do things their own way. The consequence of their choices meant that they could no longer live in harmony with the world: they will experience the pain of childbearing, work will be toil and social harmony is replaced with conflict and violence. Relationships between people and God, between different people and between people and creation were broken. Our disconnection from each other and creation has led to a broken relationship with God.

This broken relationship is known as sin. Sin is the misuse of human freedom[13] and our human failure to accept the limits and responsibilities of our place within the whole creation. 'Sin is the self-conscious rebellion against the creator'[14]. The result of sin or human rebellion is as Paul says in Romans 6:23, death. Human sin in the form of inequality, injustice, selfishness and greed all increase human suffering.

Many aspects of our lives and our world show the brokenness caused by sin. But this is not how God created the world to be. The *'curses'* of Genesis 3 also come with a promise that God will make a way to re-create our world and to repair the relationships that have been broken by sin. While we continue to struggle with sin and its effects in our lives, we are called to uphold the original goodness of the world and to seek to live out in our lives the plan God has for this world.

Disasters are both natural and human caused. In the Christian tradition disasters were classified as moral evil (suffering caused by humans) or natural evil (suffering caused by nature). As such it is difficult to make the connection that suffering caused by nature is increasingly a result of human sinful activity. The current ecological crisis is a reflection of our broken relationship with God, each other and the creation. We have failed to be good custodians of the earth. We have failed in the proper care of the earth and in our care for our fellow human beings. We have lost sight of how creation is God's abundant gift and how interrelated, interdependent and interconnected we are. This negation has been to our and nature's detriment. We are now living in a time of ecological crisis.

Creation is groaning (Romans 8). The effects of climate change around the world on the Earth Community (creation and humans) are evident.

Collectively we are currently living the consequences of our actions. Our failure to care for creation and each other has made us vulnerable and we have put the earth system at risk. The adverse weather pattern due to climate change and global warming is anthropogenic, meaning that human beings are the cause of all this. As Galatians 6:7 reminds us *'you reap whatever you sow'*. The impact of climate change is felt and heard most deeply in the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.[15] The poor, and the vulnerable are the ones who will be most affected.

The impact of climate change is already being felt in the Pacific through sea level rise, drought, flooding and extreme weather changes. Weather patterns will become more extreme. Climate change increases hazards and disasters. Disasters are both natural and human made. On the one hand disasters are naturally occurring phenomena. Cyclones, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis and so on will continue to occur as part of the natural cycle of life and living. On the other hand, as scientists and climatologists are continually making us aware, the frequency and intensity of many of these natural phenomena will continue to increase as a direct result of human abuse and misuse of our natural resources.

The changes to the environment will inevitably have an impact on the spiritual and cultural lives of communities. Risks to the environment threaten livelihoods, food security and infrastructure. In the Pacific we understand the interconnectedness that exists between human beings and creation which encompasses the land, sea and all living non-human creatures. Therefore, risks to our environment will eventually mean risks to our community.[16]

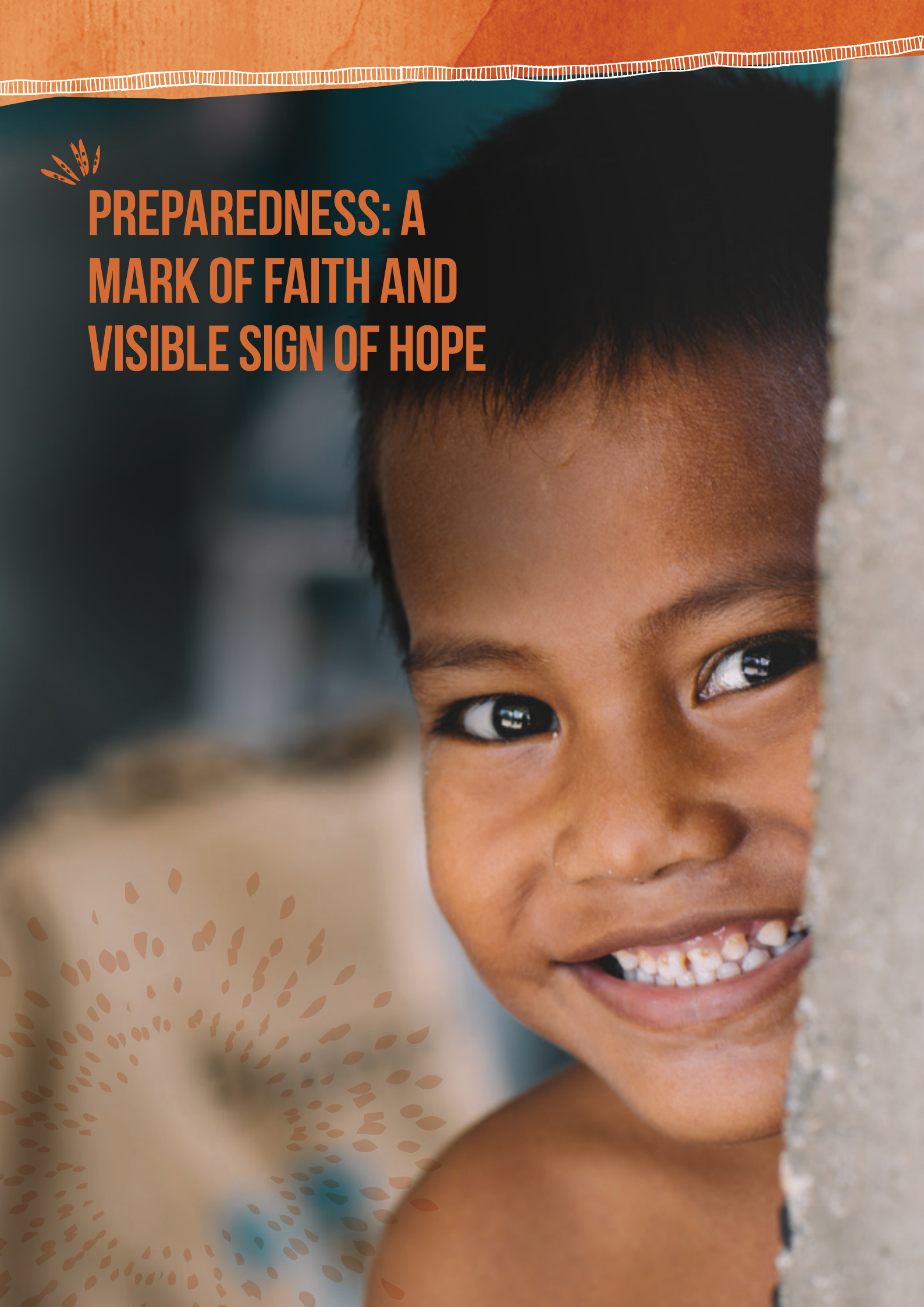
The present time calls for faithful Christian Response and Faithful Action. Our discipleship in Christ calls forth faithful, active and compassionate response and action. We may not always be able to identify or understand why disasters happen but it is an opportunity for us to respond with hospitality, compassion and love to those around us.

Clearly there are pastoral implications for the church. The church as the people of God lives and moves and has its being in God in the world (Acts 17:28). The God whom we worship is a God who continually engages with the world and is concerned when disasters occur, so it is a Divine imperative for God's church to be engaged in humanitarian response. Being church in the world where all these natural phenomena continue to occur leaves the church no other option but to engage for Christ's sake and for the entire world/*kosmos* (John 3:16).

The church collectively and individually through the local congregation gives expression to the visible body of Christ in its care of the poor and the most vulnerable in the community. The local congregation becomes the focal point of contact for many in the community during disasters. It is a role that the church must take seriously and honour, for in this instance, the church becomes the living expression of Christ and so must bare this responsibility with integrity and love.

13 Chris Walker, *Thinking the Faith,* Living the Faith Sydney, (Australia: Uniting Church in Australia, 2017), 49-55.
14 Ernst M Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate), 2005, 185.
15 Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Cittá del Vaticano, 2015).
16 See helpful resource by Kati Corlew, *Disaster and Climate Change Preparedness in American Samoa: A Handbook for Communities* (n.p.: East-West Center, 2015).

PREPAREDNESS: A MARK OF FAITH AND VISIBLE SIGN OF HOPE



NOTES

THEOLOGY OF DISASTER RESILIENCE

The primary objective of disaster resilience from a Christian perspective is to strengthen, empower and enable individuals and communities to build and maintain communities of sustainability and resilience in the face of disasters.

Critical to building, developing and maintaining communities of resilience is the Christian concept of Preparedness. A theology of Disaster Resilience has at its core the premise that *Preparedness is an element of discipleship for a Resilient Pacific Earth Community.* A theology of Disaster Resilience calls forth Faithful Response and Faithful Practice. Faithful Response is demonstrated through our faith and trust in God's unwavering love and is expressed through Christian Discipleship, Resilience and Hope. But this is only a part of the equation of trust in God. Faithful Response must also be lived through Faithful Action. It is one thing to know what we ought to do in faith; it is another to put our faith to work. Christian faith is not only about understanding what we know about God, it is equally about putting what we understand about God into action. Faith is Active.

2.1 FAITHFUL RESPONSE

2.1.1. PREPAREDNESS: AN ELEMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP

Preparedness is a Christian and biblical concept. The theme of preparedness is found in the Hebrew/Old and New Testament. The term embodies both a spiritual/theological and practical element. Preparedness is not just about being prepared or preparation for a disaster. Preparedness is a mark of the Christian life that seeks to be actively engaged in continuing Jesus mission in the world. All Christians are called to proclaim, *'the everlasting gospel'* (Rev. 14:6 KJV) to everyone irrespective of language, colour, gender, status etc. By so doing, we are obeying Jesus' words about making disciples, baptising them, and *'teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you'* as in Matt. 28:20 (NKJV). Broadly speaking, 'discipleship calls us to witness to Jesus and to the kingdom he preached, and, when appropriate, to proclaim Jesus' name and his gospel as well. Discipleship calls us to an evangelism that is done in Christ's way'.[17] Jesus commands us to love our neighbour. This command to love our neighbour is expressed through our ministry to the hurting, the downtrodden, the poor, the hungry, and the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-40). We are charged to *'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others'* (Phil 2:3, 4 NIV).

Christian discipleship has always required of us an element of preparation for the coming kingdom. Preparedness implies waiting. The question that arises then is, How do we wait? and What do we do as we wait? Waiting is not merely passive. In combination with faith and prayer, discipleship is a life of faith expressed through active discernment and action for *'faith by itself, if it has no works is dead'* (James 2: 17 & 26 NRSV). Discipleship is active, it is action and is expressed in what we do, living out the words of Jesus – *'go and do likewise'* (Luke 10:37). Preparedness, therefore, as Christian discipleship, is Active Waiting.

In the gospel of Matthew 24:36-44 Jesus speaks about the need for watchfulness and being prepared for *'no-one knows the day or the hour in which he will return'*. Jesus describes the coming of the kingdom like a thief who comes in the night. As the time or the hour will be unknown, Jesus urges his disciples to be prepared – *'You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour'* (Luke 12:40). This instruction is not about being prepared for the hour of our death to give an account of our life or our discipleship. The caution expressed here is the need to be watchful, discerning and actively preparing.

The parable of the ten bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13 is again a story about being prepared and also an example of how and what we should do as we wait. The parable tells of ten bridesmaids, five of whom brought extra oil for their lamps while they waited for the groom, while the other five did not. The five bridesmaids eventually ran out of oil and while they were out buying more oil missed the arrival of the groom and were consequently locked out of the wedding banquet. Jesus concludes the parable by saying '*Keep awake…, for you know neither the day or the hour'* (Matthew 25: 13). The message here is about being prepared and equipped. Since we do not know the 'hour', our preparatory work is crucial, critical and urgent. In relation to the cycle and ministry of Disaster Resilience, communities need to be forewarned as quickly as possible in order that they can be prepared and equipped.

Preparedness as an element of discipleship is therefore not passive. Christians are encouraged to be active as they wait. Waiting for the coming kingdom entails being active through being intentionally watchful or discerning, politically astute and engaged, as well as being alert to the opportunities that come our way that we may be able to use to enhance God's kingdom.

Preparedness also entails discerning or reading the signs of the times. The setting of Luke 12:54-55 in which Jesus says *'You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?'* is one where Jesus is teaching the crowds on the risk of hypocrisy. Here the language of interpretation carries with it the capacity to discern the signs of the times. Like Luke's community we are invited to interpret the weather patterns of our day and consider what insight they can give us of the present time in relation to the coming kingdom.

In relation to preparedness as a practical expression, there are many stories throughout the bible of individuals and communities called to prepare. Noah (Genesis 6:5-8:22) was asked by God to prepare for the flood which lasted 150 days.[18] In this story God gave Noah precise instructions about how to prepare – from the building of a waterproof boat (the ark) to the animals and birds and the food required for them to take on the ark. In Genesis 41: 25-28 we find the story of Joseph and the Pharoah. The Pharoah is warned by God through a dream about an impending famine. Pharoah responds by discerning the meaning of the dream (Genesis 41: 25-31) and as a result appoints Joseph as the steward or manager of what would be equivalent to a modern day Disaster Preparedness project (Genesis 41:40-44). Joseph demonstrates shrewd management skills and compassionate leadership. His compassionate leadership is displayed through his love, forgiveness and reconciliation with his brothers who had previously sold him to slavery in Egypt. Joseph does not discriminate in his allocation and distribution of his resources. This story also demonstrates that a prepared community is able to be resilient and sustained in troubled times.

Building a sustainable and resilient community requires preparedness. As churches, and as part of our active discipleship and custodianship[19] of creation and the resources available to us, it is our responsibility as Christians to be prepared to respond in love (see Mark 12: 28-34, 1 John 4: 10-21 & Matthew 5:43-45) and to mitigate the impact of disasters. Preparedness does

17 Jukko, Risto, and Jooseop Keum, eds. *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism.* edited by Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), xx.

18 I am indebted to Bernard Ntahoturi for his reflection on Joseph's story in relation to preparedness. "A Theological Reflection on Disaster Preparedness." In *Pastors and Disasters: A Toolkit for Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction & Management for Members and Partners of the Anglican Relief and Development Community.*, edited by Episcopal Relief Development: (n.p., Episcopal Relief Development, 2014). See also Paul Venton, and Bob Hansford. *Christian Perspectives of Disaster in Our Communities.* Tearfund Roots Resources. edited by Rachel Blackman: (n.p., Tearfund, 2006).

19 Custodianship rather than stewardship is preferenced here as it better captures the relationship and partnership between human beings and creation. Custodianship conveys our human responsibility to care for the creation entrusted to our care by the Creator.



not mean a lack of trust in God. In James 2: 17 & 26 we are reminded that 'faith by itself, if it has no works is dead' (NRSV). We are required to pray, discern and act. Preparedness embodies prayer, discernment and action.

2.1.2 PREPAREDNESS: A MARK OF RESILIENCE

Resilience in the light of disasters is developed, nurtured and strengthened through Preparedness. Cox and Perry define resilience as

The capability of a community to face a threat, survive, bounce back or, perhaps more accurately bounce back into a normalcy defined by the disaster related losses and changes. Community resilience is, in effect, a reflection of people's shared and unique capacities to manage and adaptively respond to extraordinary demands on resources and the losses associated with disasters.[20]

Developing the concept of resilience further, Siambabala Bernard Manyena, Geoff O'Brien *et al*, define resilience as the ability to 'bounce forward' and 'move on' following a disaster.[21] The concept of resilience as 'bounce forward' helps to capture the implications for pre- and post-disaster planning, including community continuity recovery planning. Ultimately, the notion of bounce forward 'is to see disaster as an opportunity for local livelihood enhancement rather than as a simple return to status quo'.[22] The idea of 'bounce forward' signals a change. It captures the idea that a community can stretch to accommodate the changes needed to address its vulnerability to natural disasters, thereby making it stronger to meet the future challengers. As well, the concept of 'bounce forward' has 'pyschological implications as it is optimistic, with a potential of assisting disaster victims and service providers to adopt positive behaviour changes prior to and after the disaster'.[23]

From a faith perspective, resilience is defined as 'growth that creates positive change in the aftermath of suffering'.[24] But this growth is only possible when 'beliefs, values and paradigms are undone by a traumatic event or significant level of stress'.[25] Disasters and suffering are a part of the cycle of life. Disasters can be a time of change and transformation, an invitation to consider where we are in our life and our relationship with God. Resilience requires the flexibility to develop new resilience skills or coping strategies to meet the new challenges that inevitably arise. It can be a time of growth and spiritual maturity. It is the ability to bounce forward and move on. In this sense resilience in theological, faith terms is transformational change.

As Christians, the basis or the foundation of our resilience is grounded in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ models the possibility of overcoming suffering and traumatic events. Jesus' earthly and human life and experience is an example of resilience despite suffering. Jesus experiences betrayal from his disciples, condemnation from religious leaders and brutality at the hands of government authorities. He is abused and spiritually forsaken on the cross and - dies. Yet, death did not have the final word. Christ's resurrection speaks of hope and new life in the midst of suffering, trauma and death.

As a practice of faith, resilience is a way of acknowledging with gratitude and faith that God provides every day. In times of abundance we have faith that God is not only providing for the present but the future as well. In times of struggle, we are able to praise and thank God for the times of abundance because our needs have been met ahead of time.

The better prepared a community is, the more resilient it will be. Responsible custodianship of our resources means that we manage and prepare what we have available to us in the good and abundant times so we can meet the challenges of the hard times. Our Pasifika knowledge, spiritual, cultural and indigenous wisdoms are also a rich source we can turn to, to help us navigate and manage our resources. Our indigenous wisdoms have helped our elders manage disasters, mitigate, adapt and thereby cultivate resilience, and bounce forward.

Proper governance, accountability and partnership with other churches, networks and organisations further strengthen resilience. In seeking to fulfil God's mission, we should not underestimate the potential of the Church as an organized community of believers. Working with fellow believers in a community, is a blessing and witness to the visible unity Jesus prays for in John 17: 20-21. Local congregations are uniquely situated within their communities to help with

20 R.S. Cox, and K.M.E. Perry. "Like a Fish out of Water: Reconsidering Disaster Recovery and the Role of Place and Social Capital in Community Disaster Resilience." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 48 (2011): 395-411.
21 Siambabala Bernard Manyena, Geoff O'Brien, Phil O'Keefe, and Joanne Rose. "Disaster Resilience: A Bounce Back or Bounce Forward Ability?". *Local Environment* 16, no. 5 (2011): 417-24.
22 Manyena *et.al*, "Disaster Resilience…", 423.
23 Manyena *et.al*, Disaster, "Disaster Resilience…", 417.
24 Davis, Kate Rae, Andrea Sielaff, and J. Derek McNeil. "Report 1: Resilience." Seattle: The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology, n.d., 8.
25 Davis, Sielaff and McNeil, "Report 1: Resilience', 8.

disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Their unique position is due to the character of the church as a community of service that cares for one another and the community around them, bearing witness to the work of Christ through their relationships of trust that is based on seeking the best for the other person and God's creation.

2.1.3. PREPAREDNESS: A MARK OF FAITH AND VISIBLE SIGN OF HOPE

Preparedness is a mark of faith and a visible sign of hope. Faith involves a willingness to act on the basis of trust rather than the lack of certainty. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1). Disasters are a reminder that the world is not what God intended. As Christians we have a vision and a hope of what the world could and can be. We dare to hope against the reality we see. As Jurgen Moltmann describes, 'Hope awakens our sense for potentiality and for possibilities of what could be'.[26] Hope is a vision of a future that is already fulfilled in Christ, yet recognising (quite painfully) the limitations of the not yet in the here and now. Hope is looking forward and waiting upon what in the future will break in with the expectation that the best is yet to come.

As hope is grounded in both the cross and resurrection of Christ, such hope enables us to find meaning in suffering and disappointment because this hope sees beyond the limits of possibility. It is a protest and resistance to suffering; it is the envisioning of an alternative reality and an opposition to despair. Biblical hope is not a mere desire for something good to happen. It is a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future even when the reality of the present states otherwise. In the face of suffering we should be determined to change things for the betterment of all. Hope inspires in us a dis-ease[27] and righteous anger against the causes of suffering and calls us into a ministry and mission of restoration of a world that is broken and creation that is groaning.

Hope sees God in the here and now as God is present in time and not outside of it. As a community of faithful we are called into a healing of the brokenness of the world through hoping into an alternative reality beyond what is considered the limits of possibility. Preparedness is both a proclamation of hope and a visible mark of faith in a world that is already possible but is yet to come.



2.2 FAITHFUL PRACTICE

A theology of disaster resilience is lived through faithful and loving practice. Building a sustainable culture of preparedness and resilience requires a shift in Christian thinking and action. Foremost, it requires a change in our understanding of our relationship with God and with nature. In particular, this will mean, reframing our relationship with nature; and stemming from this understanding, re-evaluating our role (human responsibility) and place within the whole of creation. Preparedness will require Faithful Action.

A theology of Disaster Resilience hinges on five key principles and accompanying practices that have at its core the care of creation and care for people throughout the disaster preparedness cycle. The five principles are:

1) Earth Community
2) Inclusion
3) Active Discipleship is Preparedness in Action
4) Pasifika Knowledge and Wisdom
5) Prophetic Voice

2.2.1. EARTH COMMUNITY

It is Christian belief that the world is God's gracious gift to all (human and non-human creation) and that God's offer of life is abundance for all. This arises from the understanding that the world and all that is within it is God's good creation (Psalm 24:1). In this understanding the non-human creation is a valued and equal part of God's creation, just as we, human beings, are also valued and equal members of it. God intended for us to live in relationship with each other and God's creation. The creation story affirms God's love for all the earth which is inclusive of creation and humanity. As the *Otin Tai* declaration[28] reminds us that the 'implications of this vision include the need for us humans to live with respect and humility within God's creation'.[29] Our rightful response to God's love for creation is our care and custodianship of the earth. Good custodianship leads to a reciprocal relationship between people and the earth. We are dependent on the earth and must take care of it. Responsible custodianship is expressed through our care of creation and care for people. It is also to recognise that the *'Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, the Earth to sustain its balance and diversity'*.[30] Custodianship means a shift in our understanding and relationship with creation from rulers over to partnership with creation.

Earth Community is a term coined by the Earth Charter in 1991. It is the understanding that 'Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival…'[31] The Earth Community is made up of the human and non-human creation. We are all members of God's *Oikos*, God's household. We are all equal and valued members of the earth community. The task for us the Church and Christians is a re-membering and re-weaving of our interconnectedness and interrelatedness within the Earth Community. It means for us a change (another conversion or being born again) in how we understand our place and role within the Earth Community.

Amazingly, our world continues to be something that God loves, even despite the ages of sin, violence, injustice, and outright rebellion. And even more surprisingly, while God set in motion God's plan for redeeming and re-creating the world, God has given us, as believers, roles to play in the fulfilment of God's larger plans. Yes, we are the recipients of God's grace; but, from the grace we have received, we have been given our work to do as co-labourers with our Lord. What a solemn, sacred responsibility!

26 Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1967.
27 A term coined by Letty Russell to mean dissatisfaction, discomfort or unease with any status quo that upholds or turns a blind eye to any form of injustice in the church and world.
28 WCC *Otin Tai* Declaration is a statement of the Pacific Conference of Churches on climate change made in 2004. https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/otin-tai-declaration
29 See WCC *Otin Tai* Declaration https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/otin-tai-declaration
30 Norman Habel "Ecology and Bible Principles for Interpretation." (n.d.). http://normanhabel.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Ecology-and-Bible-Principles.pdf.
31 Habel, "Ecology and bible principles".

Practice

- Mutual custodianship and service
- Valuing our interconnectedness and interrelatedness with God and creation through our liturgy and Sacraments

2.2.2 INCLUSION

All people, 'the universe, the Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value'.[32] We must respect the human dignity of all people and the integrity of creation. All are created equal and worthy of respect. Human dignity and equality are endowed by God on every human being including creation. Respect for human dignity and equality is recognizing God's likeness in another human being, and affirming her/his fundamental right as being human. It is to uphold, celebrate and value the human dignity and equality of all members of the human family. Fundamentally this means that all human beings are equal and precious in God's created order regardless of whether they are men, women, girl or boy, and regardless of their gender, race, class, disability, age, sexuality or religion. Respect for human dignity and equality is realizing and making possible God's potential in each human person. Understood in this way, human dignity and equality is a fundamental human right that recognizes all people have the right to live on this earth with dignity and freedom from fear and violence. However, more often than otherwise there are groups of people in society whose dignity and equality are not respected. These include children, girls and women. People of God are called upon to ensure that those who are usually the most vulnerable in society are treated with respect and dignity. God calls us to show compassion and offer hospitality to those who are suffering, vulnerable and in need. Our hospitality and compassion should be open to all people regardless of their ethnicity, religion, culture, sex, age or ability, remembering that all people are equally valuable to God. Our policies and practice of Disaster Preparedness must include the perspectives and safety of all people within our community. The safety of women, children, youth, the elderly, those with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities, must be paramount in our polices and practice of Disaster Preparedness.

Practice

- Include and respect everyone without bias
- Exercise Protection with Dignity

2.2.3. ACTIVE DISCIPLESHIP IS PREPAREDNESS IN ACTION

Christian Preparedness is prayerful, active and discerning discipleship which in the case of disaster management is expressed practically through the four stages of mitigation, preparation, response and recovery. Preparedness does not mean passive waiting nor should it be understood as a means of escaping suffering. Preparedness is active; it is action. In this sense, preparedness is a visible, active and practical demonstration of our faith and discipleship. The practical element of discipleship in relation to Disaster Resilience has to do with giving legs and hands to knowledge, faith and love. Preparedness is an active demonstration of our practical custodianship of creation and resources available to us. In terms of discipleship, preparedness takes expression in the three interrelated spheres of the pastoral, prophetic and the practical.

The pastoral requires addressing underlying fears, grief, and weaving in biblical and theological narratives of resurrection, renewal and hope. There have been, and will be, times during natural disasters where we cannot find the appropriate words, or where spoken words will not ease the pain and loss. In such situations it is the ministry of presence which speaks loudest. Through the ministry of presence, it might just be that the still small voice of God breaks through to the deepest crevices of pain, despair, longing[33] and hope.

The prophetic aspect of preparedness has to do with the dual role churches and Christian individuals play both within their churches and in the public and global spheres challenging injustices that contribute to climate change that consequently impact on changing weather patterns. The prophetic practice should also include challenging the attitudes and theologies of exclusion of certain vulnerable groups.

The practical is giving expression to faith, discernment and prayer through action. For example this may be as simple as putting up shutters in preparation for a cyclone, being informed of weather updates, evacuation or emergency plans, safe evacuations centres that are accessible to all people and ensuring that you, your family and wider community do all that is possible to ensure everyone is safe.

Practice

- Faith and Prayer and living it out through Action
- Preparing well for disasters – for example cyclones – by putting up shutters, listening to weather updates, awareness of evacuation plans and centers
- Loving and Caring for each other, particularly the elderly, people with disabilities, children, etc…
- Ensure safe spaces for everyone whether it be in your home, the local church or evacuation centre

2.2.4. PASIFIKA KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Oceanic cultures have traditional knowledge and wisdom that are important for us to reconnect with as they will help us navigate the current time. We need to reconnect with and value what our cultures and traditional spiritualities have taught us. This includes the ability of reading the signs of the natural environment, traditional symbols and traditional methods of mitigation and adaptation. As well as listening to and caring for the needs of our human family, we also need to listen to the land and the groaning of creation.

Pacific people have traditionally had a wholistic and relational worldview.[34] Leslie Boseto describes this relationship, stating 'Our existence and our survival can never be separated from our land and sea'.[35] Being human from a Pacific perspective is understood as being intrinsically interconnected with the land, the sea, creation, and community. For Pacific people, land—*vanua, fenua, whenua* (in the different languages of the Pacific)—encompasses and embodies the physical, spiritual, social and cultural. As Boseto explains 'God's location is in creation. Our life in God is in creation'.[36]

Within this web of interrelationships there is an understanding of how everything is interconnected; the role human beings, the seasons, and all living creatures and plants play in keeping the delicate balance of life. The environment was not traditionally understood as a commodity or as purely economic interest. Land holds deep connections and roots that ground culture, identity, kinship and spirituality. It is to these traditional, spiritual and indigenous wisdom and knowledge that we must return to resource us as we navigate the present into the future.

32 Habel, "Ecology and bible principles".

33 Cliff Bird, "The Theological Rationale for Pacific Churches to Be Engaged in Humanitarian Response and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Space." Unpublished Address. Suva, Fiji, 2016.

34 Several Pacific theologians have written on this subject. For further reading see I. S. Tuwere, *Vanua: Towards a Fijian Theology of Place* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of South Pacific and College of St John the Evangelist 2002), Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga - the Household of God: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Fur Mission und Okumene, 2000) and Cliff Bird, "Pepesa - the Household of Life : A Theological Exploration of Land in the Context of Change in Solomon Islands", Ph.D, (Canberra: Charles Sturt University 2008).

35 Leslie Boseto. "Do Not Separate Us from Our Land and Sea." *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 13 (1995): 69.

36 Boseto, "Do Not Separate Us from Our Land and Sea", 69.

Our ancestors learnt to live in relationship with the Ocean, the land and the weather. They understood the delicate balance between creation and human beings. They understood what it meant to live in relationship and partnership with creation. In living with this delicate balance our ancestors learnt to acquire the skills to read the weather. They paid close attention to nature as a way of reading the signs of the changing environment and responding to it. This enabled them to go about preparing their homes, putting aside food and to plan for recovery post disaster. This was their way of preparing for natural disasters and this helped them to remain resilient as well as respectful of nature.

Practice

- Integrate Pasifika cultural understanding and practices into Disaster Preparedness

2.2.5. PROPHETIC VOICE

A theology of disaster resilience must address issues of climate injustice. Disaster resilience and climate justice are interrelated. The frequency of natural disasters is exacerbated by the changing climate caused by human selfishness and greed of a few. It is the poor and the vulnerable who feel the impact of climate changes and disasters the most. The prophetic voice and role comprises climate justice and advocacy calling to account the injustices perpetuated against creation, the marginalized, the vulnerable and the poor. Christians should speak out for a more responsible attitude to creation, and for changes to the injustices and inequities which contribute to disaster.

Practice

- Advocacy
- Creation care
- Keeping our local governments accountable in terms of how our natural resources are being used
- Calling polluting countries to account with regard to pollution of the environment

CONCLUSION

A theology of Disaster Resilience acknowledges that there are no easy answers to the problem of suffering. However, a theology of disaster resilience rests on the conviction and trust that God through Christ is present in the Spirit in the midst of disasters, suffering and despair. Preparedness as an element of discipleship is critical in building and maintaining resilient Pasifika communities. Finally, resilient Pasifika communities can be built and sustained through engaging a Christian understanding and practice of preparedness.



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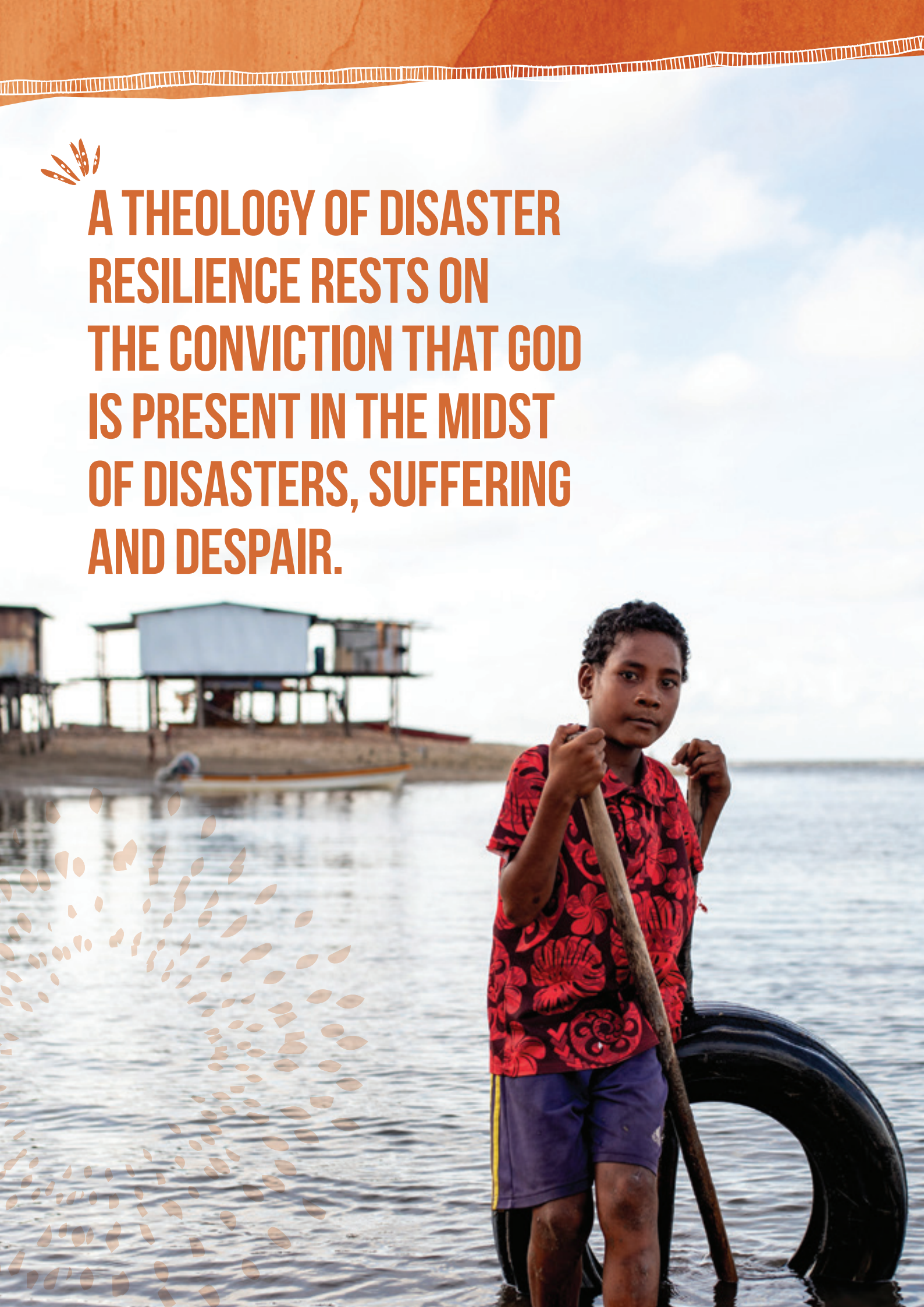
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NOTES



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