

## Introduction to Awhi Mai Awhi Atu: Women in Creation Care

I te timatanga te Kupu,<sup>1</sup>  
i te Atua te Kupu, ko te Atua anō te Kupu.

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was God and the Word was with God.

Nāna nga mea katoa i hanga; i a ia te ora.

Through him all things were made; in him was life.

I roto i te pōuri te marama e whiti ana.  
In the darkness, the light shines.

In the darkness of destruction and pollution,  
the Word speaks Beauty.

In the distancing of Me and Mine,  
the Word speaks Community.

In the despair and injustice of climate crisis,  
the Word calls God's people to faith, hope and courage.

This is our time to shine, for Christ is our light,  
Light of the world, the indestructible light of Life!

### Narrative Eco Missiology

Welcome to *Awhi Mai Awhi Atu: Women in Creation Care*. This collaborative project documents a dynamic emerging mission movement in Aotearoa New Zealand, through the voices of 30 women leading in diverse forms of faith-based environmental action.

Each story is grounded in whakapapa, family origins, and honours the shaping of culture. Each story reflects on childhood experiences and relationships with the natural world and with God. And each story describes initiative and innovation in response to a driving conviction that God cares about the state of the world, both environmental and human, and that God needs Christian people to be part of the solutions. A concluding chapter attempts to articulate the theology that underpins our mission, in conversation together.

This is, then, narrative eco missiology. Missiology because it explores the theology and practice of a mission movement. Eco, short for ecological, used interchangeably with 'creation care'; attending to our relationship with the non-human environment. Narrative from the assumption that human experience is a valid place to expect to find divine truth. This book is written in the first person, encouraging each women to celebrate her own "I", and value her own story.

As for me, my name is Silvia Purdie. Kia ora; greetings in the name of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> A mihi, or greeting, based on John 1:1-5, bilingual with the Māori Bible.

## The Book's Story

*Awhi Mai Awhi Atu* emerged from a dissertation on eco mission. As a local church minister in Christchurch I became increasingly interested in care for creation. I was introduced to A Rocha when my parish, Cashmere Presbyterian, hosted a conference on creation care in 2018. We worked together with Grace Vineyard and South West Baptist Church, and I met wonderful people like Diana, Angela and Ani. God was stirring up my own calling to environmental mission, laid down in my soul in my call to ministry many years earlier. So I joined A Rocha and started writing resources for Eco Church. In 2020 I took a year out from ministry to do a Post Graduate Diploma in Theology at the University of Otago, with a focus on ecological mission. I interviewed local Creation Care groups and was hugely inspired by what I heard. It was blatantly obvious to me that God was 'up to something' here!

To me there is no more fascinating question than 'What is God doing?' I am a pastoral theologian, trained in counselling, youth and children's ministry and community mission. So I figure the best way to find out what God is doing is to ask people: "What is God doing in your life?" August 2021 brought our second Covid-19 lockdown, which put my other projects on pause, so I decided to invite more women to tell their stories, which rapidly became a book project, which grew bigger and bigger until I finally drew the line at 30 contributors.

## Fabulous Women

I am delighted to introduce 30 amazing women. We are a diverse bunch, many choosing Aotearoa as their home after growing up in places such as Tuvalu, Madagascar, Holland, China and Canada. And many were born and bred here, from Māori and early settler roots. We range in age from the gorgeous 12-year-old Ava who leads her school Enviro team to the equally gorgeous 80-year-old Rosemary who leads her retirement village Enviro team. Some are growing national and international organisations, while others focus on growing children, a church, or a small home business. They have two things in common: first, a passionate Christian faith, and second, a sense of call to care for God's creation.

Along the way we tell some organisational history, notably 14 years of A Rocha in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the recent birth of Eco Church NZ.<sup>2</sup> This is by no means the full story of faith-based environmental action in this country. That is woven deep into the story of Māori wairuatanga (spirituality), rangatiratanga (sovereignty) and resistance to colonisation. It is also threaded through many faith traditions which have come to this land, only some of which are reflected in this collection. I would love to continue this work and hear the stories of Quaker and Orthodox women, among others. I apologise that we have only one Catholic woman. There are many more rich and wonderful stories out there!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All contributors have been encouraged to speak with their own voice and perspective, but this does not imply endorsement of all the views expressed either by A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand or by the global A Rocha family.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to pay tribute to the work of Neil Darragh in telling creation care stories of Kiwi Christians, especially Catholics, and Kiwis of other faiths, in his wonderful book, *Living in the Planet Earth: Faith Communities and Ecology*, 2016. Available from Accent Publications: [www.accentpublications.co.nz/product/living-in-the-planet-earth](http://www.accentpublications.co.nz/product/living-in-the-planet-earth)

One woman shared her story with me but decided to withdraw from the project. Her story included experiences of spiritual and sexual abuse as part of her ministry and work in the outdoors. I wish to honour her and all women who share these terrible experiences. I grieve the silencing of our stories by abuse. I celebrate the faith and courage of women who cling to the healing power of Christ in the face of the worst that human life can bring. I honour the way God brings beauty out of pain, and prepares us for mission, to be safe people for the many other women who have been abused. Creation care must be a safe space for all.



### **Karakia**

I asked each woman for a prayer, poem or song to accompany their chapter. As faith without works is dead (James 2:17), so work without prayer is exhausting! Words of poetry, offered to God, quieten the mind and enrich the soul. And I have enough tikanga Māori in my bones to feel the need to flavour our korero (words) with waiata (song). Creation care is not to be just effort, driven by guilt. It is an outward expression of the heart of the living God. In karakia we hear God's Word speaking over us and we join our words and our actions, be they words of frustration or lament or words of thanks and praise.

I continue to be blown away by the poetry of Ana Lisa de Jong who with abundant generosity has given us her story as a chapter and also 11 wonderful poems. I am very grateful to all those who have given their permission for their prayers and poems to be published here, especially the whānau of Hirini Melbourne.

### **Pointers for Action**

What does caring for creation look like in Aotearoa New Zealand at this point in our history? Sustainability and climate change are 'hot topics' in our country, and everyone seems to have an opinion about what people 'should' be doing. My observation is that there is a rapidly growing conviction in all sorts of churches that some form of environmental action needs to be part of their mission and life as a church. But what? And how?

The 81 Action Points in this book are offered to the church in Aotearoa to inspire creative mission and innovation. Creation care is a new field of mission for many churches, and there is no set strategy or 'one-size-fits-all' model. The diversity of suggestions here aims to bust stereotypes and stretch thinking about the breadth of possibilities. They provide places to start, and invite local groups to experiment and give things a try. Each Action Point is a sign post pointing in a particular direction, an invitation to journey along a path

and see where it takes you. The principles are the same as all good mission principles: Christ at the centre, building genuine relationships, living with integrity, showing faith in everyday life in the world, meeting tangible needs, respecting culture, reaching out and inviting others into community.

Rather than listing all the Action Points separately, I have included them at the end of each chapter, as they emerge from each woman's story. These mission actions are not hypothetical ideas but are ways in which God is calling people in our place and time. They are already being worked out in practice and people are already seeing the fruits of their labours, benefits for both Tāngata and Taiao, people and the environment.

The Action Points are brief missional statements, together with practical suggestions for how to implement that in a local church context. There are links to online resources and organisations committed to that aspect of mission.<sup>4</sup> They are offered here to inspire motivation, but in no way to imply that anyone ought to be doing all of them!! Mission discernment is the practice of generating energy by connecting what is on our heart, with the skills we hold, with the needs of the world. Pick a place to start and don't get overwhelmed.

Caring for creation is both very old and very new. Through most of history Christians have cared for the environment as God's world. Throughout these chapters the contributors reflect on the Biblical mandates to 'tend' the earth (Genesis 2:15) and 'have dominion over' the earth (Genesis 1:28). These women have each found for themselves a fresh understanding of what this means in our time, in response to the destruction of the earth that we have witnessed in our lifetimes. They call on the church to pull creation into the centre of mission and faith, and to find new ways to honour God through creation care.

Eco mission is caring for the natural world in the name of Christ with the inspiration and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. In practice this looks like taking small steps while asking big questions. It feels like courage in the face of huge problems and significant fears. It looks like people working together, building community, both within the church and linking outside the church. It sounds like laughter and tears, great conversations accompanied by bird song.

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<sup>4</sup> Community organisations are fluid so people and websites change; if a web link does not work some online research will find more awesome people doing awesome things. Please let the Eco Church NZ team know about other initiatives. I have only linked to not-for-profit organisations; sustainable businesses are growing rapidly and I would also encourage readers to explore these online.

## Awahi Mai Awahi Atu

E tū kahikatea  
Hei whakapae ururoa  
Awahi mai awahi atu  
Tātou tātou e.<sup>5</sup>

*Stand tall like the kahikatea  
To brave the storms  
Embrace one other  
We are one together.*<sup>6</sup>

The song 'E Tū Kahikatea' is a national taonga, a treasure of Aotearoa. Written by the great Hirini Melbourne (1949-2003)<sup>7</sup> it is sung in primary schools and in the halls of power. Its opening words were chosen as the name of the national union for service workers, E Tū. It is sung as a statement of community resilience. We are strong together; 'tātou tātou' (literally 'us, us'), strong like a kahikatea. Hirini's song refers to the way that kahikatea grow together in a 'stand' of trees. Their interlocking roots enable each to grow tall and not fall.

The line 'awahi mai awahi atu' is a simple but powerful statement, difficult to translate into English. To 'awahi' is to embrace, to hug, to support and care for. It is a heart word, a relational word, not well suited to the English language. 'Mai' and 'atu' are directions: 'mai' is towards and 'atu' is away. 'Mai' is towards close intimacy. 'Atu' is an extension outward. In the language of macho affection 'awahi mai' means "Bring it in!" 'Awahi atu' is almost a contraction in itself. How do you 'hug away'? It pushes us 'out of our comfort zone'. 'Awahi mai awahi atu' is making connections both near and far, here and elsewhere, with the familiar and with the other.

Perhaps 'awahi' might translate better into Hebrew. It feels like an expression of God's 'hesed' (faithful-loving-kindness, as in Psalm 69:16) towards us. 'Awahi mai awahi atu' echoes Jesus' commandment to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34) and Jesus subverting our categories of who we love and who we don't ("Who is my neighbour?" Luke 10:25-37).

In the context of care for creation I am suggesting that 'awahi mai awahi atu' reflects the commitment to 'think global, act local' that is central to ecological action. The 'mai' and 'atu' embrace both human and natural worlds. Perhaps 'tātou tātou' can include the animals with whom we share this world, as well as the kahikatea and all living communities of green and blue, forest and ocean.

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<sup>5</sup> The first verse of 'E tū kahikatea', a song written by Hirini Melbourne. Used with permission from the Melbourne Whānau.

<sup>6</sup> Translation supplied by the Melbourne Whānau.

<sup>7</sup> Hirini Melbourne was a Māori composer, musician, poet, university lecturer and activist. His waiata (songs) and his ability to connect with people across a wide spectrum played an important role in the revival of Māori culture, and introducing the world to the beautiful rich sounds of traditional Māori instruments. I met him once at Pipitea Marae in Wellington, and vividly remember his dynamic energy and infectious love of the power of music in community.



## **E Tū Kahikatea**

*Song by Hirini Melbourne<sup>8</sup>*

E tū kahikatea  
Hei whakapae ururoa  
Awhi mai, awhi atu  
Tātou, tātou ē

E tū kahikātoa  
Karekau e hinga  
Awhi mai, awhi atu  
Tātou, tātou ē

E tū pūriri  
Toha rā o peka  
Awhi mai, awhi atu  
Tātou, tātou ē

*Translation by Silvia Purdie (can be sung to the tune)*

Stand tall, kahikatea  
Brave in the face of the storm  
We are loved, we are loving  
We will stand as one

Stand proud, mānuka tree  
You will not fall, we are with you  
We are loved, we are loving  
We will stand as one

Stand strong, puriri tree  
Reach out your beautiful branches  
We are loved, we are loving  
We will stand as one

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<sup>8</sup> Hirini Melbourne. Used with permission from the Melbourne Whānau.

## Glossary of Te Reo

Te Reo Māori is an official language of New Zealand and is increasingly in common usage. Where Te Reo is used in this book, a translation is either given within the text (or in a bracket) or explained in a footnote. Some frequently used kupu (words) are listed here for easy reference. Untranslated words are likely place names. The macron lengthens the vowel and places emphasis. If the reader is unfamiliar with Te Reo Māori, there is an abundance of tutorials and other resources online.

<b>Ao</b>	world, realm. Te Ao Māori means the Māori world/community.
<b>Aotearoa</b>	the Māori name for New Zealand
<b>Atua</b>	God. This term is used here to refer to the Trinity of Christian faith, the God of the Bible.
<b>Awa</b>	river
<b>Iwi</b>	tribe
<b>Kai</b>	food
<b>Mahi</b>	work
<b>Māori</b>	the indigenous people and culture of Aotearoa
<b>Moana</b>	ocean
<b>Pākehā</b>	New Zealanders of European descent. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Taiao</b>	the natural environment
<b>Tāngata</b>	people
<b>Tikanga</b>	culture, ways of doing things
<b>Tūrangawaewae</b>	ancestral home, literally the place where feet stand
<b>Wāhine</b>	women
<b>Whānau</b>	family – also means ‘birth’
<b>Whenua</b>	land – also means ‘placenta’

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<sup>9</sup> As evidenced by the contributor’s stories, many New Zealanders have a mix of Māori and Pākehā ancestry and can identify as either or both. Also, Aotearoa is home to people with ancestral links to every nation on earth – we are a diverse bunch!

## Dedication

We dedicate this book to ngā tūpuna wahine, our mothers, grandmothers and role models. The world would be a better place now if we had followed your advice! Thank you for believing in us.

Patricia Harris (Amy), Mere Wahine Tai (Ana Lisa), Tumirah (Ani), Margaret Bates (Angela), Nola Bartlett (Anna), Sylvia Carter (Ava), Zhang Xiu Xian (Cathy), Mary Goad (Courtney), Hazel Slight (Diana), Silaati Aigafou Tealofi, Eleni Talua Mauga and Savali Lauti (Eliala), Claire Russell (Elise), Fualaau Tauāsili Tui-Misikopa (from Vailoa Palauli) and Faaogea Mafuatu-Loli (Vaipu'a, Samoa – Faaolataga), Tina Cairns (nee Hunt – Honey), Hong Mean Sim (Ira), Carmen Yeoh Poh Eng (Iris), Rose Victoria Hume (nee Bradshaw, te taha o tōku Papa, Ko Ngāitahu tōna iwi) and Margaret Kyle O'Brien nee Taplin (i te taha o tōku Mama, Scottish – Jenny), Hōhepine Te Wake (Jacynthia), Joyce McDonald (Jill), Elizabeth Maria Behiels-Bavré (Kristel), Rasoanatoandro (“the beautiful one of the middle of the day” – Lala), Sheila Dunbar (Marg), Elizabeth Hamlin (Marie), Sister Louise O'Kane and Karani Ngapiu (Mina), Elsie Symes Wood and Irene Faul (Nicola), Pauline Parsonson (Olivia), Hingano Hehea Anatohuia Makahili Finau (O'Love), Jessie MacInnes (Robyn), Mary Wilson (Rosemary), Vivienne Ellis (Silvia), Jean Beaumont (Skye).

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<sup>10</sup> Anglican Women's Studies Centre: <https://anglicanwomen.nz>



## Stories

*Poem by Ana Lisa de Jong, Living Tree Poetry* <sup>11</sup>

My story is woven in your story.  
Because our paths crossed,  
connected, carried on in step,  
diverged,  
I have become a bigger story.

If we are each of us streams,  
then the place we flow into each other  
is our rushing river, our brimming over,  
our rich heritage.  
We have become a grateful history.

And the place we flow out of each other  
to put down sweet roots,  
our offshoot from the branch, our fertile bush –  
our tūrangawaewae –  
is where we stand separate but together.

I am glad to be in this river with you.  
Your blessing is my drink,  
my sustenance your pleasure, twin streams  
in differing directions.

We become a waterway of many branched tributaries.  
Our stories intertwining, dividing,  
becoming bigger.

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<sup>11</sup> Copyright: the poems in this book by Ana Lisa de Jong are used with permission. 'Stories' and 'Dumb' are published in *Release from Darkness – Words for Spring*. 'A Change of Heart: A Poem for the Planet' and 'Plenty' are published in *From Beauty for Ashes – Words for Autumn*. 'Soft Beast' and 'Turning Point' are published in *A Garment of Praise – Words for Summer*. Each publication is printed by Humanities Academic Publishers, 2021. 'Absence', 'Hiccups', 'Mustard Seeds' and 'No Explanation' are previously unpublished. To read more of Ana Lisa's poetry, or to make contact about her books or use of her work: [www.livingtreepoetry.com](http://www.livingtreepoetry.com).

