

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Cook Islands 7 March, 2025

“I Made You Wonderful”

- Slide 2:** The Cook Islands consist of 15 islands scattered over 2 million square kilometres within the Pacific Ocean. Out of the 15 islands, 12 are inhabited.
- The capital of the Cook Islands is Rarotonga, a volcanic island with a population of 10,040 (of a total of 15,040 people). Many Cook Islanders now live abroad in New Zealand (approximately 80,000) and Australia (approximately 20,000).
- Slide 3: (History)** The 15 islands that are now called Cook Islands were first thought to have been inhabited between 500 - 800 A.D., by people from islands in what is now known as French Polynesia.
- Slide 4:** Polynesians are thought to have migrated from Asia starting in 1500 B.C. Cook Islanders are true Polynesians, connecting directly back to the finest seafarers of the Pacific.
- Slide 5:** Oral history tells that the island of Avaiki (thought to be Ra’iatea in the Society Islands) was the “mother of the lands” and the origin of the Polynesian people. Ru was a young explorer living in Avaiki, who loved to discover new islands. Ru made landfall on the island now known as Aitutaki. All the district chiefs today can trace their ancestry to the 20 royal virgins who came with Ru.
- Slide 6:** The first record of Europeans in the Cook Islands came in the late 16th century with the Spanish explorers, Álvaro de Mendaña and Pedro Fernandez de Queirós who, stopped for provisions in Rakahanga on March 2, 1606. After this, there is no further record of European contact for 150 years.
- The British explorer, Captain James Cook came to the islands in his expeditions of 1773 and 1777. Despite the islands eventually carrying the great navigator’s namesake, Captain Cook only went ashore on the then uninhabited island of Palmerston. Captain Cook had named the group the Hervey Islands, after a British Lord of the Admiralty, but they were renamed Cook Islands, in honor of the great explorer, some 50 years later.
- Slide 7:** Education has always been important in Cook Islands society, and it serves to unite and strengthen the country.
- Slide 8:** Education in the Cook Islands has close ties with the educational system of New Zealand. Early childhood education focuses on children from birth to 5 years. Children aged 3-5 are eligible to attend Early Childhood Education centres. Primary and secondary education are free and attendance is compulsory for children between the ages of 5-15. For the first 3 years (ages 5-8), the language of instruction in the Cook Islands is supposed to be in Maori. In year 4, the teachers start introducing the English language, although many know and use this already.
- Slide 9:** A concern on the capital island of Rarotonga is the decrease in people speaking the Cook Islands Maori language. More and more families are speaking English in their homes. Teachers at the schools are faced with a dilemma where many children do not know how to speak Cook Islands Maori when they first start school. Many Cook Islanders who were born before 1965 were subjected to physical and verbal abuse for speaking their Cook Islands Maori language, and today, Cook Islands Maori is listed as an endangered language on the UNESCO spectrum.

- Slide 10:** Young people are a vital part of any society, as the future of the country's social fabric, work force, and community. According to the 2016 Cook Islands census, there has been a decrease of approximately 200 youth since 2011, leaving just over 2,087 youth. This decline has been attributed to young Cook Islanders relocating for educational and work opportunities abroad.
- Slide 11:** Church, sports and school are the greatest support networks for young people through the Cook Islands, where they often turn for help and support.
- Slide 12:** Child mortality rates in the Cook Islands have been declining over recent decades, and they now have the lowest child mortality rates in the Pacific. However, the figures hide disparities within the remote outer islands where there are significantly higher rates of under-5 deaths.
- Slide 13:
(Arts and Culture):** Pandanus (screwpine) and rito (coconut leaf fibre) are the main natural fibres that women in the Cook Islands use for weaving. Pandanus is used to weave mats, baskets, hats, fans, and table mats.
- Slide 14:** Rito is very unique in our weaving, although a few other Pacific islands use it, too. Rito is mainly used by women in the Northern Group Islands for weaving hats, fans, earrings, bags, purses, and traditional and dance costumes. Rito comes from the coconut tree, which Cook Islanders call "the tree of life."
- Slide 15:** Ei katu is a garland of flowers worn around the head, and it is also known as a flower crown or head garland. Ei katu is made by Cook Islands women and young girls. It is worn by both females and males as a symbol of love and belonging. It is a circle, which means that everything is connected. When presented as a gift, ei katu represents an embrace of love.
- Slide 16:** Ei pupu are shell leis made on the island of Mangaia. These leis are very difficult to make. The process involves women spending long hours among rocks after rain showers, picking up little yellow snail shells. The shells are cooked and dried, then drilled with holes and threaded on a fishing line.
- Tivaevae is the art of making handmade patchwork quilts. It was introduced by missionaries' wives, and transformed into an art form that is celebrated throughout the Cook Islands.
- Slide 17:** The Cook Islands is a nation rich in history, culture and heritage. To commemorate the 4th of August birthday of Cook Islands as an independent nation, an annual event is held, called the Te Maeva Nui Festival. This is a week-long cultural celebration of Cook Islands arts, crafts, music, song, dance and local food. Cook Islands people and culture are their greatest asset, and the whole nation comes to a standstill as they celebrate their unique culture during this festival.
- Slide 18:
(Land)** The "land tenure system" was established through the Cook Islands Act of 1915, which stipulated that native land could not be bought or sold, except to the government for public purposes. Instead, all native land would be passed to the children of Cook Islanders. Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu follow this Act of 1915, though the rest of the islands use the tribal system.
- Slide 19:** The Cook Islands are in an enviable position where most people own and live off the riches of their own land. Cook Islanders are proud to be wonderful caretakers of their family tribal land.
- Slide 20
(Tourism):** The Cook Islands has more than 800 accommodation providers, including backpacker hostels, family home-stays, self-catering villas and luxury hotels.

- Slide 21:** Key tourism attractions include coral reefs and atolls, sandy lagoon beaches, forests, waterfalls, volcanic peaks and cultural events displaying local music, song, dance and food. In the Cook Islands, tourism is often described as being both a blessing and a curse.
- Slide 22:** The Cook Islands' first international airport opened in 1973 on the island of Rarotonga. Tourists began to arrive in significant numbers soon after. Before the opening of the airport, agriculture represented the main industry of the country, but tourism is now the main industry.
- Slide 23:** The Gospel was brought to the Cook Islands in 1821 through the London Missionary Society (LMS) by John Williams. Christianity was accepted first in the island of Aitutaki by the Paramount Chief, Tamatoa Ariki.
- Slide 24:** The missionaries attempted to suppress the singing, dancing and drumming of the Cook Islands inhabitants. However, this was the cultural heritage of the islands, and eventually, Cook Islanders found a way to beautifully blend their Polynesian heritage with their Christian faith.
- Slide 25:** In 1839, the Takamoa Theological College was established in Rarotonga to train locals in theological studies, leading to a large number of pastors and church leaders in the Cook Islands. This college is the second oldest institution in the Cook Islands for theological study. Today, the Cook Islands is a majority Christian nation, where the people are driven by a strong sense of community and cultural values that come from their belief in God.
- In 1968, the Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council was set up to advise the government and traditional leaders on key issues affecting the social, economic and cultural development of the people of the Cook Islands.
- Slide 26:** Christians in the Cook Islands come together annually for ecumenical prayer. They seek God's protection over their nation during the cyclone season, and they offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's continuous protection and blessings over their beautiful Cook Islands. How unique and wonderful it is to come together in prayer and worship!
- Slide 27:** There was a great celebration in 2023 by the people of Aitutaki, marking 200 years of Christianity in the Cook Islands.
- Slide 28:** The diverse roles undertaken by women are significant in contributing to the fabric of Cook Islands society. Each community defines its leadership roles according to the needs of the community. The Ariki are a group of hereditary paramount chiefs of noble rank in Polynesia. Each island in the Cook Islands is ruled by a group of Ariki, whose status comes not just from birth, but also from their achievements and respect within the community.
- Slide 29:** Cook Islands women in business are established authors, poets, artists, photographers, jewellers, carvers and designers of unique local fabrics. Exhibitions, fashion shows and presentations are held locally and internationally to promote these products.
- Women stall holders and their families sell their products at the renowned Punanga Nui Market in Rarotonga.
- Slide 30:** Free health care is provided to all students until the age of 18, and for all pensioners aged 60 years and above. There is a shortage of doctors to maintain high coverage in the workforce, with a shortage of skilled nurses. Medical care is often referred on to New Zealand. The Cook Islands did not escape the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. International border restrictions meant that the Cook Islands suffered economically and socially. Local Puna clinics provided accessible primary health care within the villages, with nurse practitioners onsite and doctors alternating between each one.

- Slide 31:** The first service of World Day of Prayer (WDP) was held on the island of Rarotonga in 1971.
- Slide 32:** WDP was brought to the Cook Islands by the late Mrs. Akaiti Ama of the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), who also became the patroness for WDP Cook Islands for many years.
- Slide 33:** Since 1972, each church has taken turns in hosting the World Day of Prayer service, a practice that continues today.
- Slide 34:** In 1990, WDP Cook Islands formed a committee with a total of 13 women from 6 different denominations: CICC, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Church.
- Mrs. Rebecca Akaruru (from the Catholic Church) was nominated to attend the WDPIC International Meeting in Jamaica from July 28 - August 6, 1990. At that meeting, Mrs. Akaruru was elected to be an alternate Regional Representative on the WDPIC Executive Committee for the Pacific region.
- Slide 35:** The WDP service continues to be an annual event in Rarotonga and the Pa Enua (the islands other than Rarotonga).
- Slide 36:** Our current WDP Cook Islands committee organized a Writer Workshop in August, 2022, to launch the writing process for the 2025 programme.
- Slide 37:** The group continues working together to prepare for upcoming programs, especially 2025.
- Slide 38:** The 2019 WDPIC Executive Committee.
- Slide 39:** In 2017, the Cook Islands was fortunate again when the late Mrs. Henrica Nio Marona was elected at the WDPIC International Meeting in Brazil to serve as the Pacific Regional Representative. She served in this role until her passing in 2021.
- Slide 40 (the artwork and artists):** The lagoons and oceans are bountiful with sea life, fish and gems (like black pearls), which link to the world. On each island, the mighty coconut tree stands tall, a symbol of strength and goodness. The coconut tree provides for health and wellbeing. Cook islanders are grateful for the arrival of Christianity to their shores 200 years ago. Christianity brought hope, peace and light, with an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The precious Tivaevae quilts represent patience, love and unity. They honour God's love and mercy with hats they wear to church, woven by skillful loving hands from the strands of rito, the young coconut leaf. They adorn themselves with sweet scented Tiare tropical flowers, made into crowns and garlands.
- Slide 41:** Tarani Napa and Tevairangi Napa are a Mother-Daughter artist team from the Cook Islands. They feel honoured to have been able to share this piece of artwork in recognition of their love for their home, their faith, and their heritage. Tarani Napa is a mother of six children and three grandchildren. She is a certified primary school teacher, entrepreneur and creative artist. Tevairangi Napa is the eldest daughter of Tarani, and she is a proud mum of two children. She follows in her mother's footsteps as a creative artist.