



# World Day of Prayer

Prepared by the WDP Committee of the Cook Islands

March 7th 2025

“I made you Wonderful



## RESOURCE BOOKLET

**Preparation: Country Notes: Recipes:**

*World Day of Prayer (Scottish Committee)*

*Charity Number SC020446*

*Website <http://www.wdpscotland.org.uk>*

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### PREPARATIONS

Gather the following symbols:

#### **Flowers**

Fill the altar space with brightly colored and diverse flowers. All those who are leading during the service can wear flower leis and/or 'ei katu (flower crown or head garland). Have a single flower available for each person who comes to the service. *Tiare Maori* is the National Flower of the Cook Islands and can be used if available. Other flowers common in the Cook Islands include hibiscus, chrysanthemums, and plumeria.

*Flowers are an integral part of Cook Islands identity, symbolising love, friendship and respect. People frequently wear flower crowns and leis, and flowers often appear on Cook Islands fabrics, art, clothing and quilts (tivaevae).*

#### **Blue fabric, bowl of water, shells**

Use blue fabric, a bowl of water, and shells on the altar space to evoke the ocean.

*The ocean is a defining feature of life in the Cook Islands. The ocean is life. It is a source of food, livelihood, and a means of travel. The ocean connects people and communities.*

#### **Coconut tree leaves or fruit**

Include a photograph or drawing of a coconut tree. If coconut leaves or fruit are available, these can also be used on the altar space.

*The coconut tree is referred to as the "tree of life" in the Cook Islands, because every part of the tree is useful. It provides food, drink, medicine, handi-crafts, and building materials.*

## **Canoe**

Include a canoe (or picture of a canoe) on the altar space.

*The canoe is the traditional means of travel for Cook Islanders. This symbol represents the God-given ingenuity of our Polynesian ancestors who created the canoe.*

## **Bible**

Include a Bible on the altar space, opened to Psalm 139:14.

## **Service Arrangements (Optional)**

**PRELUDE** - Option Have the sound of ocean waves playing as participants arrive (10-15 minutes before the service starts). These ocean waves can be audio or video recordings. Distribute a flower to each person who enters. Invite them to put the flower behind their ear or wear it in the lapel.

**WELCOME CHANT** - Leaders 1, 2 and 3 stand together in the front of the congregation as the service begins. Musicians lead the welcome chant.

**WELCOME AND CENTERING** - .....

**SONG OF PRAISE (THEME SONG)** - Musicians lead the congregation in singing. Leaders 1, 2, 3 remain standing.

**SCRIPTURE, STORY & SONG** - Before each Woman's Testimony the Musicians can lead the congregation in acapella humming of the theme song melody at a slower tempo.

**SCRIPTURE READINGS** - Scripture Reader speaks either from the back of the congregation or offstage.

**INTERCESSORY PRAYERS** - At the end of each leaders prayer the theme prayer song can be sung.

The Lords Prayer can be spoken in Maori or your own language and style.

## **OFFERTORY**

A recording of Cook Islanders singing can be played while the offering is taken. Alternatively, a local choir could engage this imeni tuki.

*"Kia aruru te enua katoa" (Let the lands rejoice in thunderous acclamation)*

## **A MUTUAL BLESSING**

So, let's offer a mutual blessing to each other now whilst the instrumentalists can play the theme song in the background.

## **COMMITMENT TO 'PRAYERFUL ACTION'**

Play recording of the ocean waves for 1-2 minutes.

## **POSTLUDE**

Musicians can play an instrumental version of the theme song as the leaders move to greet people.

## **Songs on YouTube**

God who Knows Us

<https://youtu.be/nvuZkKpDtj4>

Wonderfully Made

<https://youtu.be/ZxiWitGCjbl?si=4RMn6OKJtb0k5YkV>

My God Loves Me

<https://youtu.be/1rhQp5eftms>

O God, You Search Me

[https://youtu.be/F4ScBPE9v\\_I?si=wi7fMPSJvzQC-8lk](https://youtu.be/F4ScBPE9v_I?si=wi7fMPSJvzQC-8lk)

"Kia aruru te enua katoa" (the lands rejoice in thunderous acclamation)

<https://youtu.be/eoGiRZUP1MY?si=TP8VPWkGk1ss8a6N>

# Country Notes about The Cook Islands

We, The Cook Islanders are proud of our unique and special culture. We are friendly, vibrant, colorful, courageous, hospitable and enthusiastic. This Country Background was written by a group of Cook Islands women for the World Day of Prayer celebration in 2025. We invite the world to learn more about us from the information provided below.

## GEOGRAPHY

The Cook Islands consist of 15 islands scattered over 2 million square kilometers within the Pacific Ocean. Out of the 15 islands, 12 are inhabited. They lie in the center of the Polynesian Triangle and are surrounded by neighboring Polynesian islands - Tonga, Samoa, Tahiti and islands



of French Polynesia. Archeologists trace the settlement of the islands to the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The capital of the Cook Islands is Rarotonga, a volcanic island with a population of 10,040 (of 15,040 total people). Many

Cook Islanders now live abroad in New Zealand (approximately 80,000) and Australia (approximately 20,000). The current population living in the Cook Islands reflects a massive decrease in population over recent decades.

## 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 what is now known as French Polynesia. They came in great double hulled canoes, navigating by familiar stars as they were well known seafarers. Oral history mentions Avaiki (thought to be Ra'iatea in the Society Islands) as the origin of the Polynesian people.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a High Chief named Toi built the ancient inland coral road in Rarotonga, known as the *Ara Metua*. Each tribe had its own *marae* (sacred meeting place) and worshipped gods. The *koutu* was the most important meeting place of all, the ruling seat of the *ariki* where feasts, offerings and sacrifices were held. These historical sites are still preserved today.

The first record of Europeans in the Cook Islands came in the late 16th century with the Spanish explorer, Álvaro de Mendaña, sighting the island of Pukapuka on August 20, 1595. 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. Cook also never sighted the largest island Rarotonga. That honour was left to the mutineers on HMS Bounty, who landed on Rarotonga in 1789, during their escape to the Pitcairn Islands.

## **CHRISTIANITY**

The Gospel was brought to the Cook Islands in 1821 through the London Missionary Society (LMS) by John Williams. Despite initial suppression efforts by missionaries, Cook Islanders blended their Polynesian heritage with their Christian faith. The Takamoa Theological College, established in 1839 in Rarotonga, trains locals in theology. Today, the Cook Islands is predominantly Christian, with the Cook Islands Religious Advisory Council advising on key issues and overseeing religious events. The largest church is the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), comprising about 49% of Christians in the islands.

There was a great celebration in 2021 by the people of Aitutaki, marking 200 years of Christianity in the Cook Islands. In 2023, at the time that this Country Background was being finalised, plans were developed and carried for the 200 year celebration of Christianity throughout the Cook Islands.



All denominations are engaged, and people from New Zealand and Australia came to honour this celebration.

## **WOMEN**

This World Day of Prayer programme highlights the achievements and struggles of Cook Islands women, who significantly contribute to socie-

ty in various roles including leadership, education, sports, and cultural activities. Women's NGOs such as the Cook Islands Business and Professional Women (CIBPW) and the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW) support women's empowerment and address issues like social and economic justice, environmental concerns, and gender equality. Despite these efforts, domestic violence remains a significant issue, with many incidents going unreported. Efforts to eradicate domestic violence require improved resources and trained counsellors.

## **LAND**

Most Cook Islanders own and live off their land. Major changes began in 1901 when Britain transferred control to New Zealand. The 1915 Cook Islands Act established a land tenure system where native land cannot be sold, except to the government for public purposes. Rarotonga, Aitutaki, and Atiu follow this system, while other islands use a tribal system. The ownership and inheritance of land are crucial aspects of Cook Islands' culture, linking the people deeply to their ancestral heritage and ensuring that land remains within families across generations.

## **TOURISM**

The first international airport opened in Rarotonga in 1973, making tourism the main industry. In 2019, tourism accounted for 66% of GDP, with Rarotonga and Aitutaki receiving most tourists. The COVID-19 pandemic led to economic hardship but also prompted a re-thinking of tourism strategies towards sustainability. Efforts are now being made to diversify the economy and promote ecotourism, ensuring the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage while providing economic benefits to local communities.





## **EDUCATION**

Education in the Cook Islands is modelled on New Zealand's system, with early childhood education for ages birth to 5 years, compulsory primary and secondary education from ages 5-15, and tertiary education available locally and abroad. The Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI) offers courses which meet the needs of the tourism industry, while the University of the South Pacific (USP) has a local campus. 80% of the labour force have participated in tertiary level education, with females and males having the same levels of achievement.

Concerns include a decline in the use of the Cook Islands Maori language, now listed as endangered by UNESCO. Initiatives are in place to revive and promote the language, such as incorporating it into school curricula and community programs.

## **HEALTH**

Free health care is provided to students until age 18 and to pensioners over 60. The health system faces challenges like a shortage of doctors and skilled nurses, and a high burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact, but the Cook Islands managed high immunization rates and only one COVID-19 death. Public health campaigns focus on preventing NCDs through promoting healthier lifestyles and regular medical check-ups, aiming to reduce the long-term healthcare burden.

## **YOUTH**



Youth, aged 15-24, are vital to the Cook Islands' future. The 2016 census showed a decrease in youth numbers due to migration for education and work. Youth unemployment is the highest among all age groups, exacerbated by the pandemic. Support networks include church, sports, and school. Challenges faced by youth include low self-confidence, stress, peer pressure, and issues like obesity and

suicidal thoughts. The Cook Islands Youth Policy (2021-2026) aims to guide stakeholder groups in supporting youth development. Programmes focusing on skill development, mental health support, and entrepreneurial opportunities are being implemented to address these challenges and empower the youth.

## **CHILDREN**

Child mortality rates have declined, with universal immunization coverage for 10 of the 12 recommended vaccines. However, remote islands have higher under-5 death rates. Gaps in the child protection system and legal framework leave children vulnerable to violence, highlighting the need for improved protection measures. The government and NGOs are working together to strengthen child protection services, providing training for caregivers and establishing safe environments for children.

## **WELFARE**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs manages welfare benefits, including maternity leave, and provides support for the elderly, children, and people with disabilities. There is no unemployment benefit. Social welfare programs aim to ensure basic living standards and address poverty. Efforts include improving accessibility to social services and expanding support for vulnerable groups to enhance their quality of life.

## **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cook Islands government, with New Zealand's help, supported residents through business assistance, wage subsidies, free education courses, health packages, and reduced power rates. The government's response ensured a 96% immunization rate against COVID-19. The swift and effective measures taken have been credited with minimizing the pandemic's impact on the islands, allowing a quicker recovery compared to many other nations.

## ARTS & CRAFTS

### WEAVING

*Pandanus* (screwpine) and *rito* (coconut leaf fiber) are the main natural fibers that women in the Cook Islands use for weaving. *Pandanus* is used to weave mats, baskets, hats, fans, and table mats. In the past, *panadus* was also used for covering the roof. *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, traditional costumes, and dance costumes. *Rito* comes from the coconut tree, which Cook Islanders call “the tree of life.” It’s the young, unopened creamy coloured center frond of a coconut tree. After being cut, it is split, boiled, dried, and uncurled. The preparation of the *rito* is one of the hardest parts. *Rito* hats is authentic and handmade. Each hat is unique, as the weaver who made it uses techniques passed down through the generations. It takes at least 5 days to weave a *rito* hat. *Rito* hats are worn by women to church on Sundays, to special occasions and functions, given as gifts to VIP delegates that visit, and are gifted for weddings and birthdays.

Ancient Cook Islanders used to weave *maka* (sandals), fishing nets, rope and eel traps out of *sinnet* (a part of the coconut tree). This is a rare art form today.

### TIVAEVAE (patchwork quilts)

Patchwork quilts, introduced by missionaries’ wives, have become a celebrated art form, used as bedspreads and heirlooms. These quilts often feature intricate designs



that tell stories of the islands' history and culture, making them treasured possessions passed down through generations.

**EI KATU (head garland)**

Flower garlands symbolize love and belonging, worn by both genders for various occasions.

**EI PUPU (shell leis)**

Shell leis from Mangaia are labour-intensive, representing cultural craftsmanship



**CULTURE**

The Cook Islands celebrate their history, culture, and heritage through events like the Te Maeva Nui Festival, a week-long celebration of arts, crafts, music, dance, and food. Other cultural events include the Te Mire'Atu song writing competition, the Te Mire Ura dance competition, and the Te Mire Tiare flower festival.

These events not only showcase the islands' vibrant culture but also play a crucial role in preserving traditional practices and fostering community spirit.



## WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

The first World Day of Prayer (WDP) service in the Cook Islands was in 1971. An ecumenical National Committee was formed, including members from various denominations. The WDP service continues annually, with a decline in attendees since COVID-19, but the spirit of prayer remains strong. The 2025 program is being prepared with contributions from women across the Cook Islands, highlighting the theme “WE ARE BEING MADE WONDERFUL!” This theme resonates with the community's resilience and unity, celebrating the spiritual and cultural richness of the Cook Islands.



***“WE ARE BEING MADE WONDERFUL!”***

## COMMON PHRASES USED IN THE COOK ISLANDS MAORI LANGUAGE

***KIA ORANA*** – Hello, greetings. *\*The literal translation is “May you live a long and fulfilling life.”*

***AERE RA*** – Goodbye. This is said to a person who is leaving.

***KA KITE*** – Farewell. Another way of saying goodbye to a friend

***MEITAKI*** - Thank you.

***KIA MANUIA*** - Good luck.

## Recipe for Poke (serves 4)

### *Ingredients*

*2 cups cooked pumpkin or mashed banana*

*1 cup tapioca powder (arrowroot starch)*

*3 tablespoons lite coconut cream*

*¼ cup evaporated reduced-fat milk*

*¼ cup water*

*2 teaspoons cornflour*



### Method

Heat oven to 150°C.

Place mashed pumpkin or banana into a saucepan and continue to mash and mix over a medium heat until it forms a thick paste and comes to the boil. If you are using banana, it will have changed colour to become almost purple. Allow to cool.

Once cooled, mix in the tapioca until it is smooth and lump-free.

Spread the mixture into an oiled tin or baking dish that will allow the mixture to be about 2-3cm deep. Cover with tin foil and bake for approximately 2 hours or until a smooth skin has formed on top. Allow to cool slightly before cutting into small squares.

In a saucepan, mix together the coconut cream, evaporated milk, water and cornflour. Heat gently, stirring consistently until coconut sauce comes to the boil, remove from heat. Serve poke with a drizzle of coconut sauce.



# Ika Mata

## *Ingredients*

- 400 grams fresh tuna
- 4 lemons, juiced
- ½ cup coconut cream
- ½ cup red capsicum
- 1 cup cucumber
- ¼ cup red onion
- 1 tsp salt (or, to taste)



Wash and dice the tuna into bite size pieces. Add to a clean bowl. Add the juice of 4 lemons to the bowl of tuna, cover and let it chill in the fridge for 30-45mins.

Dice the cucumber, capsicum and onions. Cover and let them chill in the fridge until the tuna has finished marinating.

In a new bowl, add the marinated tuna and lemon juice along with 1/2 cup of coconut cream and mix. Add all the diced cucumber, capsicum and onions to the bowl and mix well.

Add 1 tsp of salt to taste.





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