

**The Messenger  
Of the Parish of St Thomas, Tamaki  
Spring Edition, 2023**



**Animal Sunday, 1 October 2023  
(More pictures inside)**

# **A Reflection on the 2023 Parliamentary Elections in New Zealand**

***By Reverend Doctor Noel Cox, Vicar***

Elections hold a significant place in the fabric of modern democracies. They are not just political processes but also occasions of deep societal reflection. In this note, we can explore the theology of elections, using the context of the 2023 parliamentary elections in New Zealand as a case study. While theology is often associated with religious discourse, it is important to recognise that it also extends to the broader concepts of morality, ethics, and the fundamental principles that guide our actions. Elections are a perfect lens through which to examine these profound ideas.

At its core, the theology of elections in New Zealand embodies a democratic covenant. Democracy, derived from the Greek words “demos” (people) and “kratos” (power), emphasises the collective exercise of authority. In a democratic society, every eligible citizen or permanent resident has the sacred right to cast their vote, contributing to the common good. In New Zealand, this concept is deeply ingrained in the nation’s identity, as the country is celebrated for its progressive and inclusive democratic traditions.

The process of elections itself can be seen as a ritual, a collective act of acknowledging or even worshiping the democratic ideal. Citizens come together on a predetermined date (or nowadays, for some days before also), bringing their hopes and aspirations, and engage in the solemn act of voting, much like a congregation gathering for a religious ceremony. This act symbolises a commitment to the principles of democracy, much like a covenant between a divine entity and its faithful.

In democratic elections, citizens exercise their moral agency, a concept reminiscent of theological ideas concerning free will. They have the freedom to choose candidates and parties based on their beliefs, values, and principles. This moral agency is an expression of human autonomy, a divine gift according to many

religious traditions. When individuals cast their votes, they are not merely selecting representatives; they are endorsing a vision of the common good that aligns with their moral compass.

Theological themes of justice and righteousness underpin the moral agency exercised during elections. Citizens are called to seek justice, fairness, and the welfare of all, just as many religious doctrines exhort the faithful to strive for the well-being of the entire community. In the context of the 2023 New Zealand elections, the choices made by voters reflect their understanding of what is just, righteous, and ethical for the nation.

One central theological aspect of elections is accountability. Elected officials, just like individuals in the eyes of the divine, are accountable for their actions and decisions. The act of voting is a form of judgment and an implicit call for accountability. In a democracy, elections serve as opportunities for the redemption of past wrongs, as well as a renewal of faith in the political system. In the New Zealand context, voters assess the performance of incumbents and may choose to "forgive" or "punish" them through their ballots. This was noticeable not only nationally, in a loss of fortune by one party, but also locally, in the loss of the confidence of the majority of voters in this electorate in the incumbent, although his party obtained a majority of votes.

Our theology teaches us the concept of redemption and forgiveness as fundamental to spiritual growth. Similarly, elections provide a means for the nation to heal and progress, moving forward with the belief that better days are ahead. By participating in elections, citizens engage in the process of redemption and contribute to the collective evolution of the nation.

Elections are not merely political events but expressions of a society's commitment to the common good, justice, moral agency, accountability, and redemption. As New Zealanders cast their votes, they are not only shaping the political landscape but also participating in a sacred act that defines the nation's identity and future.

## More Photos from Animal Sunday



***"You are very cute"***



***"You are also very cute" (Above & Below)***





***Cuddly Hamster s (Above) and Attentive Congregation (Below)***





*The Vicars dogs being nice and quiet for their carer*



# The Churches of the Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is a region with a significant historical and religious significance, particularly for Christians. While it does not have as many Christian sites as other regions in the Holy Land, it is still home to a few noteworthy Christian sites, some of which remain in use. Here are a couple of them.



The Church of Saint Porphyrius is located in the heart of Gaza City. It is one of the oldest Christian sites in the Gaza Strip, and by far the oldest active one, being founded by 425 AD. It is dedicated to Saint Porphyrius, a Christian bishop who lived in Gaza during the fourth century. The church has a long history and has undergone several renovations over the centuries, most significantly in 1150-1160. It is considered a significant religious and historical site for both the local Christian community and visitors. It belongs to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Said to be the third oldest church in the world, it was damaged by Israeli air strikes in October 2023.

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The Holy Family Church, is the only Roman Catholic church in the Gaza Strip. It is located in Gaza City and serves the Latin Christian community in the area. It is an important religious institution for local



Christians and is occasionally visited by pilgrims and tourists interested in the region's Christian history. It started life as a school, which continues to serve the local community.

The Gaza Baptist church is the third of only three Christian churches in the Gaza Strip, whose densely packed population of over two

million is overwhelmingly Muslim. Due to threats and attacks on clergy and parishioners alike, the church's pastor, and many of the congregation, fled the Gaza Strip after 2008. For this reason, it is not officially recognised by the Hamas-led government of the Gaza Strip.



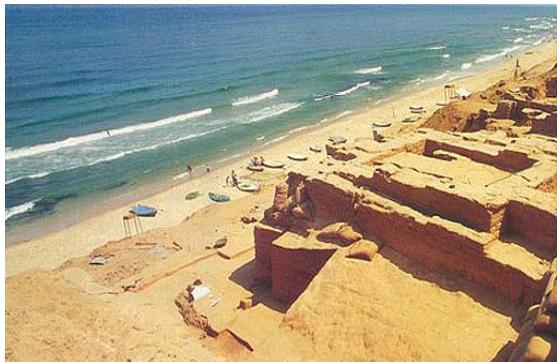
The Gaza Baptist Church is an archaeological site in the centre of Gaza City. It is associated with an ancient church, the remnants of which have been discovered in

the area. Archaeological excavations at this site have revealed Christian artifacts and structures that are of historical importance.



A Byzantine Church dating back to the fifth century in Jabaliya in northern Gaza was renovated and restored into a public museum by the Hamas-run Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, in a bid to revive domestic tourism. The church, dating from 497, was in ruins and only rediscovered in 1988.

The Gaza Mosaic Museum houses a collection of stunning mosaics, some of which are believed to have originated from Christian churches in the region. These mosaics often depict Christian themes and provide insight into the art and culture of ancient Christian communities in Gaza.



The Anthedon Harbour, located in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, is believed to have been used during the Byzantine period and may have connections to early Christian communities.

Archaeological excavations at this site have revealed evidence of a basilica, suggesting the presence of a Christian church in the area.

The old city of Gaza itself contains historical sites, some of which are believed to have been important to early Christian communities. While not exclusively Christian, the architectural and archaeological remnants of this area may provide insights into the region's ancient Christian history.



Saint Hilarion Monastery (Tell Umm Amer) is an ancient Christian site located in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. The monastery is believed to date back to the fourth century and was named after Saint Hilarion, a Christian hermit and ascetic.

hermit and ascetic, who is regarded as the father of Palestinian monasticism. The site was abandoned after a seventh-century earthquake and rediscovered by local archaeologists in 1999. The site includes the ruins of a church and a monastery complex. Although in ruins for centuries it is still used for worship by locals.



Al-Omari Mosque, the Great Mosque of Gaza, was originally built in 635, and became the church of St John in the twelfth century (1150), and converted into a mosque again in 1291. The mosque was largely destroyed by air strikes in October 2023.

Recent events have led to human suffering on a large scale, as well as the destruction of property both in the Gaza Strip and adjacent regions. al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, site of a major explosion in October 2023 – the source of which was still disputed as this is being written – is run by the Anglican Church. Founded in 1882 by the Church Missionary Society, it is one of the oldest hospitals in the city. The only Anglican congregation in Gaza worships at St Philip's Chapel, which is in the grounds of the hospital. The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East is led by their Presiding Bishop, the Archbishop in Jerusalem, the Most Reverend Dr Hosam Naoum. The Archbishop carried the Bible in the Royal procession at the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. The holy oil for the anointing had previously been consecrated by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, and Archbishop Naoum.

# UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

**By Lizzie Samuel**

Once again Christmas is approaching and it is the time Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of **JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.**

The gentle Jesus came from Heaven as a gift of love with a message of love, peace and salvation to mankind.

God our creator came into this world in human form leaving behind His Glory and Power.

The creator became like a created being, a beautiful baby. On His Birthday, Jesus has moved the hearts of all people to do noble things. Christmas is a time to shout from mountain tops, singing the popular carol '*Joy to the world the Lord is come'*

It is a time of giving and loving; the tradition is symbolic of the greatest gift given to mankind.

'How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given; This is how all gifts are expected to be given,

But in today's materialistic world, Christmas is celebrated with pomp and glory, with banners and fanfare, and it is used for commercial sales promotions, and the true meaning of Christmas is forgotten. So sad.

Do we pause for a little while and think of the humble baby Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger?

Jesus loved children; Jesus loved simplicity; love and humility.

Above all He loved children. Children took pride of place in the heart of Jesus.

He said let children come to me and forbid them not, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven. He urged children to come to him.

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME TO SHOUT FROM MOUNTAIN TOPS

SINGING THE POPULAR CAROL,

JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME

As children depend on adults to fulfil their needs for love and protection, God in his wisdom placed children in families, so that they can be nurtured and prepared for life as responsible good children. But is our society looking after our loving children?

Take some time to ponder over this, as once again we approach the birthday of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us reach out our hearts to those innocent dependents – orphaned, displaced children in our midst - and let us bestow our love and gifts upon them.



## Looking Back

## So as to Look Forward

***Tony Poole***

Although there were earlier editions of this magazine, the first edition of the Parish Magazine with which I was associated was published in the Summer of 2017, during Mark Sullivan's time as Priest in Charge of the parish.

Mark had arrived I think sometime during the previous 12 months, and was the first in a series of Priests in Charge, following the retirement of the last full-time priest in the Parish (Archdeacon David Steel). Mark invited me to join the St Thomas Congregation as a liturgist and member of the congregation, because he had no liturgists and knew I had been a liturgist in two previous parishes.

Shortly afterwards, he also asked me to edit the Parish Magazine, which I have done for the last six years.

As you know, many people have contributed to the magazine over the years, and continue to do so. The Magazine Editor also writes articles as required, and the very first article I wrote for the messenger was a two-and-a half- page article calling for volunteers to also become liturgists. The roster (for the next six months!) was included, and I see that Peter Newton had by that stage volunteered, as did Mark's daughter Georgie shortly afterwards.

Everyone gets old and/or moves on, and we are again very short of liturgists. I repeat some of the sentences I first wrote six years ago at the beginning of article referred to above:

*"In a sense, the liturgist leading the service represents all of the people. To be a liturgist requires no particular training, and no special qualification, except to be a baptised member of the Anglican Church. - - - You do not need to be particularly "good" to be a liturgist, just feel you have a calling to help make the service run smoothly. Ideally, a liturgist requires a well organised mind, an attention to detail, a willingness to "roll with the punches" when things turn in an unexpected direction, and humility because your part in the service is no more important than that of any other parishioner."* To that, I would now also add a clear, audible speaking voice, because (as must be very obvious to everyone) I can no longer speak either clearly or audibly like I used to.

When the group of liturgists was first formed, I produced a booklet of the relevant parts of the service, so that they would not have to look through several pages of the service so as to find the one small section they needed to say. If this is required again, or any other revision required, I would be happy to assist with this if required. However, I would not be offended if I was not required!

Turning again to the Messenger, that like being a liturgist is a joy to produce, but is also becoming an increasing burden. There are very few contributors of articles these days. Leith writes wonderful articles, but is ill. Ron too – but he is deceased. Joan was a major

contributor, but she is very ill and has moved to another rest-home. Steve and Janet have been regular writers, but their health too I believe has limited their output recently. I apologise if I have omitted anyone, or mentioned anyone incorrectly. Apart from Noel and I, only Lizzie contributed to this messenger.

Producing the messenger requires a number of skills; Christian writing obviously; but also typing, proofreading, assembling, and negotiating with the printers (currently *Warehouse Stationery*) I feel that in the fairly near future, typing, proofreading, assembling and negotiating should be taken over by a small production committee, who together would be responsible for the printing of the Messenger, while those people who don't find it too difficult to write (Noel, Myself, others who might volunteer or be encouraged to write) could write articles for the magazine, having first checked with the production committee- that what they plan to write is acceptable to the Vicar and the Magazine Committee. (The vicar should always have the final say on what is acceptable, and what is not.)

All of this may sound as though I am planning my own demise, which I definitely am not; but I most certainly won't stay alive for ever either. I now live in a rest home, and need to have a rest after lunch each day. As mentioned above, I now have a voice which is neither always clear, nor audible because of historic reflux. In addition, I have two separate illnesses which I will ultimately *die from*, or *die with*; only time will tell which – my doctors don't know which at this stage. In addition, only my left eye is good enough to get me a driving licence, and I have difficulty accurately typing, and doing computer work. I have a blood test every four weeks which is closely analysed, and I daily take 12 prescribed medications, plus a thirteenth self funded medication on the recommendation of my optometrist.

So, I'm not dying, and I'm not planning to die yet. But, it would be really good if someone, or a group of people, was to step up and take on some of my jobs in the parish; and I'm sure you would enjoy doing them, just as I have.

Thankyou

**The Anglican Parish of St Thomas, Tamaki**  
*Corner of St Heliers Bay and Kohimarama Road*

P O Box 25-462  
St Heliers  
Auckland 1740  
Telephone 521 -2697

Email: [stthomastamaki@gmail.com](mailto:stthomastamaki@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.stthomastamaki.org.nz](http://www.stthomastamaki.org.nz)

**Priest:** Revd Dr Noel Cox  
4/170 St Heliers Bay Road  
St Heliers 1071  
020 40794554  
noel.cox34@gmail.com

**Bishop's Warden:** John Miller  
528-4433 / 027-224-0693  
[jmiller@pl.net](mailto:jmiller@pl.net)

**People's Warden:** Leith Hamilton  
528-9624 / 021-170-7972  
[leithalix@xtra.co.nz](mailto:leithalix@xtra.co.nz)

Bank Account: Parish of St Thomas Tamaki  
Account No: **03-0259-1257104-00**