



**PRIMATE AND ARCHBISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN AOTEAROA,  
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BISHOP OF POLYNESIA**

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**Inaugural Melanesian Commission Established by the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia  
A renewed Anglican commitment to justice, healing and hope for the descendants of the  
Blackbird Trade**

The Anglican Diocese of Polynesia has formally inaugurated the Melanesian Commission, setting before the Church and the wider community a solemn and hopeful commitment to the renewal of Melanesian life, dignity and future within the Diocese. Rooted in the movement from the old and painful narrative of “forgotten people” toward the Gospel promise of becoming “people of God’s promise,” the Commission is established as a strategic and pastoral instrument for truth-telling, justice, reconciliation and practical transformation.

Grounded in the Five Marks of Mission, the Commission brings together the Church’s spiritual calling and its public responsibility. Its work is directed not only toward proclamation and pastoral care, but also toward the urgent realities confronting Melanesian communities, including land insecurity, poverty, education, youth employment, substance abuse, cultural erasure and the enduring wounds left by colonial history. In this way, the Diocese affirms that the mission of Christ must be expressed in loving service, courageous advocacy and the restoration of human dignity.

The Diocese also announces with gratitude that His Grace Archbishop Leonard Dawea of the



Anglican Church of Melanesia has accepted the invitation to chair the Commission. This is a strategic appointment of deep ecclesial and historical significance, intended to foster a closer relationship between the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia and the Anglican Church of Melanesia on the basis of a shared inheritance, a common faith and a common responsibility. Through this partnership, the Commission seeks to address the injustices of colonialism with honesty and Christian resolve, while helping to build a future of hope for the descendants of the Blackbird Trade.

Archbishop Sione Uluilakepa has emphasized that the Commission is not merely an administrative body, but a spiritual and moral undertaking for the life of the Church. He said: **“We are bringing our people together on a common foundation to confront the wounds left by colonialism, to honour the dignity of the descendants of the Blackbird Trade, and to build, with God’s help, a future shaped not by abandonment, but by promise.”**

At the heart of the Commission’s framework is a pastoral theology of presence, humility and sacrificial service. Its vision reflects the call to “sit with” communities, to listen before leading, and to understand pain at its roots before attempting to speak into it. This spirit is echoed throughout the strategy, which insists that renewal must begin with talanoa, patient accompaniment and a deep attentiveness to people, land, memory and place.

The strategic framework of the Commission is organised around six principal output areas: Land Rights and Advocacy; Consultation and Community Engagement; Education and Capacity Building; Cultural and Historical Recognition; Church and Government Relationships; and Communication and Awareness. These six areas are further strengthened by a cross-cutting poverty alleviation strategy, reflecting the Diocese’s recognition that poverty lies near the root of many contemporary social hardships, including vulnerability to displacement, youth marginalisation and substance abuse.

Particular weight is given to the question of land, which the Diocese recognises as inseparable from belonging, security and intergenerational wellbeing. The framework calls for lease audits, land-rights documentation, formal relationship-building with iTaukei landowners, and legal and administrative measures to secure Anglican settlements for the future. Alongside this, the Commission proposes a substantial investment in education and youth development, including vocational training, scholarship support, cultural identity formation and employment pathways, so that the next generation may find not only survival, but genuine opportunity and vocation.

The Commission also gives clear attention to healing the historical and spiritual wounds borne by Melanesian communities. The Diocese seeks to replace narratives of silence, exclusion and victimhood with a new language of remembrance, restoration and promise. The intention is not to deny suffering, but to bring it into the light of truth and to lead beyond it in hope.

To ensure faithful implementation, the framework establishes a clear structure of accountability through the Melanesian Commission, a diocesan implementation team, and settlement-level

leadership bodies involving trustees, elders, youth and women’s representatives. Over a two-year roadmap, the Diocese will focus first on foundations—through audit, mapping, formalisation and partnership-building—and then on renewal, through the launch of vocational programmes, cultural initiatives, poverty alleviation measures, expanded drug-prevention efforts and heritage documentation. The Commission’s work will be measured not only by plans adopted, but by lives strengthened, communities secured, voices heard and hope made visible.

In inaugurating the Melanesian Commission, the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia declares anew its intention to walk with Melanesian communities in the way of Christ: with repentance where there has been failure, with courage where there has been injustice, and with hope where generations have long carried pain. The Commission stands as a sign of the Church’s resolve that the descendants of the Blackbird Trade shall not be defined by neglect or dispossession, but by dignity, promise and a future held in the grace of God.