

## **MY FAITH JOURNEY – Juliette Tautala’aso (“One Great Sunday of Sharing: Sun, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010)**

I was born in Auckland to Samoan immigrants who travelled to NZ by boat, in the 1950’s. My parents met and married in Auckland, NZ and had six children. I am one of them. Our half-brother and half-sister, who were born and raised in Samoa, have also been much a part of our lives. From eight children, I am ranked #5, in order of seniority.

In 2007, I entered into a ‘Period of Discernment’ with the Uniting Church. I have learned much during this time. Foremost, that I belong to God, in Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the things I have discerned in my faith journey.

As a NZ-born Samoan who now calls Melbourne home, I know I do not have to nestle on the outskirts of an Anglo culture that I was privileged to be born into, educated and forged a career – all of which has taught me much. Neither do I have to nestle on the outskirts of my Samoan culture that I am privileged to know and claim as my ancestral heritage, thanks to my parents.

There is no comfort and enjoyment in our fruits without failure, hurt and struggle. The only way to make sense of God’s purpose for me, was to immerse myself into both Samoan and Anglo cultures. I strived to use the best of both cultures in my family life, church, education, sports, career, and marriage and in nurturing my own children. These have been my learning platforms. I saw a way that God in Christ encouraged me to embrace, guided by His Spirit. I have been nurtured and been privy to the fruits from both cultures and I continue to learn. **This would not have been possible if it were not for the Grace of God.**

Working hard, listening and being obedient to my parents was non-negotiable growing up in NZ. The Lord has taught me that these skills are still important, for that is why I am at this point in my faith journey. These skills have helped me through school, in my 22yrs of Banking and in my relationships with people and family.

In NZ, Debt Collection was not a popular area of Banking, my colleagues and I aspired to seek promotion in. When the Bank restructured and centralised accounts in 1988, I was asked to apply for one of two remaining positions in the elite area of Collections. It was my view that I was not cut out to be cut throat! (No pun intended). After some weeks of deliberation, I applied. Sixteen years in Collections, I learned to see a common thread: instead of demanding payment from people; people were more likely to make repayments and sustain them, if the human element of understanding and the willingness to help, was part of the solution. Unfortunately, there are times when people have to resolve for themselves the reality of their own predicament. In both situations and over the years, I have come to realise that it is **people and the human element, God was drawing my attention to.** There is no higher vocation in this world than to serve others. In this sense, my former Banking experience became an extension of my faith.

Since moving and settling in Melbourne, I often reflect on how we came to be here. It's obvious, God had a reason. What helped me to begin to take serious the Good Lord's purpose for our move to Australia came when we were members of the former North-West Samoan Uniting Church Congregation. Our group needed to move from our former worshiping premises. Our very limited resources were fast running out. Our prayers were answered by the St John's Essendon Uniting Church congregation. In the latter part of 2004, we were graciously and warmly welcomed to St John's. Niuia's family, Salima's family and our family, who originated from the former group, began to worship here in 2004. Something that began as an interim relationship between the two congregations: Samoan and Anglo - turned into a permanent relationship. **God again, was drawing my attention to the people and the human element.**

**I have been asked many times, why our family travel to worship at St John's? My answer is simple – it is the people!** Our family have forged loving and solid relationships with some deeply-spiritual, caring and loving members of St John's. You have taught me about the cost of discipleship and reaffirmed in me that love must be shared, for you have opened yourselves up to our family, our culture and embraced our differences; offering hospitality, opening your homes, offering guidance, sharing your wisdom and still giving. I am sure the Samoan Cluster and many of you who came as guests as we did, and remained permanently, will relate to all this.

No longer am I a guest at St John's. Being part of the Samoan Cluster, I have been humbled to be known as a member of St John's, when we have hosted regional Samoan UCA gatherings, the memorial service for the Head of State and King of Samoa in 2007 and the service for the Samoan Tsunami disaster last year. Many times I have been moved to tears by people and the human element of loving acts of kindness, understanding and the willingness to help!

**God is constantly reinforcing my faith and has captivated my attention to people and the human element in our relationships with each other. The basis of all relationships should be centred on Jesus Christ. Perhaps, that is why in the Gospel reading of Luke 10:39 "...Mary...sat at the Lord's feet and listened..." - Mary knew the importance of listening to Jesus and learning from Him.**

In Christ, I have come to know God and learned to avail of His Holy Spirit. Nurtured in my faith through my churches in NZ and here at St John's – I am truly thankful to God's people – people have taught me much in my faith journey. And so, with the love and encouragement from my husband, Lei, our children, Tamara, JJ, and Laban, and the support of family and friends - I have felt a strong call to serve the Lord. Because of my strong sense of call, I am offering myself for Ordained Ministry through the candidating process of the Uniting Church. I do not know what the outcome of this process will be. What I do know – is that my life will always belong to GOD!