

A Visit to a Marae (Ken Choo, 27-10-2015)

A group of five pastors from five Baptist Chinese congregations in Auckland, together with thirty-five other brothers and sisters went to visit a marae in Tauranga recently. This was the first time ever these Chinese speaking believers had been exposed to the culture of our beloved Māori brothers and sisters in Christ.

On arrival, the participants were overwhelmed by the official reception into the marae, the powhiri. The children sung in front of the marae and this was followed by formal ceremonies conducted in the marae. The community elders, together with the participants, in Māori language and Mandarin, echoed a friendship-dialogue which signified an official welcome to the marae. The climax of this welcoming ceremony ended with the traditional Māori greeting, the hongī, where we greeted one another by pressing noses.

Later, the participants were divided into three groups in order to participate in different workshops to learn more of Māori culture. In the workshops, all of us learned simple Māori words, and we were also taught to sing a Māori song. It was also a wonderful experience to listen to one of the community leaders explaining to us the significance and historical information of a marae to the Māori people. For those who were more artistically inclined, there was an opportunity to learn weaving with the fresh flax bush cut from the compound of the marae – this was well received!

In the evening, we were served a delicious dinner and each of us enjoyed the hāngī, the traditional Māori style of cooking. We then gathered in the marae for a time of sharing and prayer.

At night, all of us, males and females, young and old, (the youngest participant was a three-year old girl) experienced community living as we slept side-by-side in the marae.

Time flew. The next morning, we began with some exercises and after breakfast, we gathered again in the marae for the last session of sharing. Many of the participants shared how they appreciated the Māori culture and expressed heartfelt thanks for the hospitality offered by this Māori community. In this poroporoaki, the climax was once again the hongī, where we pressed noses as a way to farewell one another.

In understanding and appreciating the Māori culture a bit more, we pray that we might also have opportunities to share the gospel also. Praise God.

