

Festival 2016, Ngongotaha

This year's Festival was the third to be held in the idyllic lakeside setting of Willowhaven Park in Ngongotaha, on the outskirts of Rotorua. The weather was cloudy throughout, with some rain showers, but the rain stayed away on Friday and Saturday, the days of our organised outdoor activities.



We were greatly privileged this year to welcome a visiting speaker from the Philippines, Dr Rey Taniajura, and his wife June. They had been invited partly to strengthen the links with our growing Filipino congregation based in Masterton. Our Filipino members now make up almost a quarter of the GCI membership in NZ.

Most of the Filipino men, who are employed as beekeepers, had to work during the week, but a convoy of 5 cars brought 21 Filipinos on the 6-hour journey to the site on Friday. This boosted our attendance to a high point of 77 on Saturday.

The Festival theme, "Being Christ in Community", was explored from different angles by the various speakers. Events began with supper on Tuesday evening. On Wednesday morning Dennis Gordon led a praise and worship service and Brian Barnes introduced communion. Festival Coordinator Dennis Richards gave the opening sermon, "Hearts in Community", launching from Psalm 133 into an exposition of the unity-producing principles in Romans 12:9-13.



Dr Taniajura gave two sermons and two seminars. These were packed with information, revolving around topics like discipleship, spiritual formation and mission, and expounding on the wonderful resurrection life Christians can enjoy today as they participate in the great dance of salvation, revelling in the glorious relationship we have with our Triune God.

Rex Morgan gave a sermon on the Shekinah showing God's presence in the community, and David Wong spoke on glorifying God in our relationships with others, in the context that "the heart of community is to glorify God". The Filipino youth provided special music on Saturday and Sunday.

Les Evans led a youth study, "My Story", helping the young people to consider the elements that form the unique life story of each individual.



This year the Wellington church put on the dinner and family evening, with MC Peter Best introducing some lively games and contests. A number of members got to play "Deal or No Deal", and there were variations on bingo and musical chairs, as well as a competition in banana demolition and reconstruction.



The seniors enjoyed a trip to Wingspan Bird of Prey Centre, after a lovely café lunch. Meanwhile, the youth tested their skills on the maze and other activities at aMAZEme adventure park.



The final social gathering was a sumptuous potluck BBQ at Willowhaven.

A collection was made for the St John's Church Rotorua food bank, whose staff were thrilled by the amount donated for the size of our group.

After five days of stimulating worship, fellowship and activities, everyone left rather reluctantly, having drawn perceptibly closer to one another and to our gracious God.

After the Festival, Rey and June Taniajura travelled to Masterton to spend a few days with the Filipino community.

