

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: 30th August 2009
Representation and the Super City

The picture painted by Pita Sharples (co-leader of the Maori Party), of Maori gathered outside with their noses pressed to the window while the Pakeha sit around the table inside, has stayed in my mind. In our church, we declare that everyone is invited to the table no matter race or social standing; everyone is encouraged to participate. So it is difficult to think that a system of representation that excludes people from participation is acceptable when as Christians we are charged to be inclusive. Hearing oneself speak at the table and experiencing the affirmation of participation and acceptance is immeasurably important, especially when you have known exclusion and been disregarded. Maori, the people of this land, need to experience the power of inclusion around the Auckland table with the people who will make decisions about this region. As we move into a different administration era, Maori need to be decision makers and not just asked to be 'advisors' or cultural celebrants. It would appear that there is a hangover from earlier colonial times finding new expression in efforts to exclude Maori from this level of governance. Despite the increased diversity of Auckland's population, the place of Maori as the original inhabitants of this place needs to be recognized at the heart of decision making for this place. Numerically Maori do not have the numbers today to be elected in an open field unless Pakeha and other tauwiwi vote for them. And this has not been common practice up till now!

From a Christian perspective it is important for us to think deeply about these issues and actions that have the potential to marginalize a section of our society. Maori as tangata whenua are deeply connected to this place in a spiritual way that seeks to ensure the wellbeing of the land and people who live here are accounted for. We understand the concept of good stewardship, and seek to exercise it over our resources and in relation to the earth. This concept is deep in Maori culture as they seek to exercise kaitiakitanga; good stewardship.

Susan