

Views from the Pews - Leadership

The Queen's death has enabled much reflection on the nature and quality of leadership.

This week we were reminded of a little-known incident on that first Royal Tour here in 1954. The Queen had been advised by the then New Zealand Government not to go to Turangawaewae Marae, presumably because the Government and the Kingitanga had unresolved issues. The Queen decided to ignore that advice, and to breach protocol by calling in to the Marae. It may have been a short visit, and was probably as informal as possible. Tainui never forgot.

The Queen – perhaps subconsciously – knew that if she was to preside over an orderly dismantling of the Empire (and the bloodshed of Indian Partition would have been on her mind) she would have had to bring all the diverse indigenous peoples of the Commonwealth on side. Otherwise there would be no Commonwealth.

Stories are already emerging of the Queen's keen interest in – and quiet backing for – the Treaty settlement process. This was a highly symbolic role that she undertook, knowing that she represented the very essence of Pakeha influence, but also that she embodied the Crown as Treaty partner.

Was it precisely because she was immune from the political tides that sweep leaders into and then back out of office that she felt free to do things that politicians cannot or will not do?

There is a lot the Church can do to lead a discussion about leadership – especially those aspects of it that entail self-sacrifice. It may not be so much a question of how a leadership role is acquired, but what you do with that role. One recurring theme in our collective remembrance is the Queen's sense of duty; that feels quite odd in an age that appears to extol selfishness. Her death marks many things – could it also mark a reset in the way we treat one another? It cannot be coincidental that Jim Bolger described the Queen as 'a great healer', and that Sir Geoffrey Palmer said she 'would have made a wonderful foreign minister'. We would do well to reflect on her example.

Finally, we need to pray for the Dean and staff of Westminster Abbey – as this piece is being composed there is no official word on the date for the Royal Funeral. The Abbey will be busy preparing for yet another very public act of ministry.

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