

President's APM Report 2023

As I write this report in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle, my heart goes out to all celebrants who are affected, and also to our colleagues in the funeral services sector. The scale of the impact is beyond comprehension and the event has been traumatic and overwhelming for those who have experienced the devastation first-hand. As your celebrant whanau, we've held out our hand to those who may need assistance - to try to connect people up and to support members with replacing precious celebrant resources. This offer remains open, and we ask that members email support@celebrantsaotearoa.co.nz if they need assistance.

The past three years have indeed been challenging, with the impact of COVID changing our face-to-face interactions and to some extent the way in which we now plan our lives. Slowly we're learning how to re-engage and we've certainly learnt the value of having a collegial network (Celebrants Aotearoa) at our back.

The work of the National Executive is to support branches to re-engage with members in a way that meets the members' needs; and that can vary from region to region. In general though, the National Executive feels more than ever, that members want connection and networking; but also feels, we now need to work with this in a different way and at a very local level. To this end we're exploring an idea called "Connect Local" using post-codes as a way of establishing sub-regional informal chat groups. The idea being to connect locally over a coffee or wine with celebrant colleagues who live in your smaller geographic area, and you'll be hearing more about this from us. Cyclone Gabrielle has demonstrated how essential that local community connection and support is.

This report is relatively concise (what a blessing!) because we do communicate strongly and effectively fortnightly through the 'Wrap'. We hope that you, our members, continue to find this publication relevant and useful.

As an organization we're in a strong financial position, which enabled us to undertake two key projects over the past months. One is front facing and specifically for the benefit of members. This was the redesign of the certificates for marriage, commitment ceremonies, vow renewals, anniversaries, baby naming's and the like. We encourage you to have a look and to use the applicable certificate for the relevant occasion/s. There are both digitally editable versions, as well as plain PDF versions that can be printed and filled by hand – something for everyone! The other key project is more behind the scenes, where we've uploaded all our documents to the website (which we pay for and has storage capacity) and have relinquished Dropbox. This has made it easier for NE, branch committee and conference committee to access shared resources.

Your National Executive maintains a strong and positive relationship with BDM and has worked collaboratively with them on the new single registry script, with the final version uploaded in Feb 2023. An updated T&Cs document has also been provided which enables registry celebrants to work clearly with couples; and more importantly ensures that the provision of personalised ceremonies is the focus of our work and that where needed (and appropriate), couples are provided with a personalized ceremony - even if it's simple, and you, the celebrant are reimbursed accordingly.

We'll shortly be investing energy into changing-up our social media starting with a demarcation between our public facing profiles and CANZ chat (our members chat forum). You may have noticed we're starting to pop a bit more content into CANZ chat to keep you informed and up to date. One of the exciting things we did last year was to celebrate National Celebrants Day which we'll continue to do, broadening this out to celebrate this more fully with World Celebrants Week. Events such as this also give you the opportunity to maximise your own promotional activities.



Another major change across this year is the ability to add your celebrancy qualification to your members profile. This has been highlighted on the website, so please do login to make any necessary changes including a professional/ very good quality, head and shoulders photo, languages spoken (loading "English" is required and others as appropriate) and ensuring your primary area is the region in which you live.

We've continued to streamline the validation (VCANZ) process; recruiting more validators and supporters and have provided numerous communications and support to our members who have renewed their validation in the 2022- 2023 year. We're thrilled to have worked with Hazel in her role as our virtual Business manager (VBM) and it's this initiative which sees us trying to reduce the workload for the President and National Executive moving forward.

In October last year, we entered into an agreement with My Celebrant App for an initial six month period to offer you, our members, a discounted rate and will be reviewing this shortly. Another new initiative sees us adding advertisers to the 'Wrap', which commenced after receiving positive feedback via a members' survey about the idea.

Last year's second virtual conference was timely and, of course necessary due to the ongoing challenges of COVID and we're very much looking forward to this year's conference in Ōtepoti / Dunedin. We're celebrating the opportunity this offers us to meet face-to-face, connect, network, rejuvenate old friendships and build new ones as we listen to and engage with the diverse array of top-notch speakers that are coming to inspire and challenge our learning and knowledge.

On a more reflective note, Celebrants Aotearoa is sad to lose the well-established and valued relationship of ten years with Jeff Montgomery – the now previous registrar-general but is looking forward positively to a new era with Russell Burnard – the new RG.

And as always, my thanks goes to our branch committee members, current and resigning for the work they do in supporting branch activity and professional development opportunities for you; the National Executive members for their tireless work in keeping the inspiration and improvements going from the top-down – they do a huge amount of work in behalf of you all; to the VCANZ validators who have had an exceptionally busy year with renewals – and to the VCANZ supporters who give members that little bit of support they need to get started or get across the line; and last but not least – to our fabulous Celebrants Aotearoa Support team who execute our ideas with professionalism and energy and keep us all operationally sustained with their wonderful support.

In looking ahead to the 2023-2024 year, we look forward to growing our membership, changing with the times and remaining responsive to our members needs whilst upholding a commitment to professionalism and the highest standards of practice possible as we serve our couples, families and communities with integrity and heart.

Warmest wishes to you all,
Rachel Clarke – National President for Celebrants Aotearoa