

Tell them we love them...

Peter Matheson

6/10/1938–14/4/2025



'Kua hinga te tōtara o Te Waonui a Tāne'

The tōtara in the great forest of Tāne has fallen

A coffin woven of harakeke, New Zealand flax, a māori voice calling a faithful servant home, tributes from around the world, and a 3 am online presence for those joining online from afar at the funeral of Peter Matheson, former Member of the Iona Community.

An intellectual, theological and spiritual giant, a warrior for peace, indefatigable, 'menaced', a he would put it himself, 'by hope', The Revd Professor Emertius Dr Peter Clarkson Matheson died on 14th April 2025, aged 86. I'd been with Peter and Heinke, his life-long companion in mischief, just 2 weeks before he died, delighting in laughter, and stories and the surprise of the love – the aroha – that had grown since I first met them at Otago University in Ōtepoti Dunedin.

Mary, Kathy, Caro and myself - associated and Members of the Community - shared our memories and sense of his vital contributions to weave this obituary, in the manner of the weaving of those who work with the flax.

Peter was a peace-maker from the justice school to the very end, dripping blessings, and rarely easy ones, on all who crossed his path.

Our thoughts and love are with Heinke, Donald and Catriona and the family and whānau.

Tribute from Alison Phipps

I first met Peter in July 1995 as I began ten weeks of study at Knox Theological Hall in Dunedin. Students were each invited to join an informal pastoral group, facilitated by a staff member - Peter had that role in my group! He was very welcoming, not least to someone who was only part of the group for a short time.

I had already heard about Peter pinning 90 justice and peace theses to the door of New College, Edinburgh, when he was a student there. So it was no surprise that within two weeks of being in Dunedin, he led a poignant service remembering the nuclear tests over many decades on Pacific islands, and voicing his fierce anti-nuclear stance. Amen, brother!

Tribute from Caro Penney, Warden at Iona Abbey

AUTUMN PASSION

Bright autumn Christ,
The silver birch,
The bell-bird's call,
The vibrant light,
The glory through
The pain.

Sharp autumn Christ
The fallen leaves,
The slanting sun,
The hint of frost,
Toll for the life
That's gone.

Dark autumn Christ
The broken branch,
The weeping tree,
The whole sad
Earth gasps
Piteously.

High autumn Christ
The teacher gagged,
The friend betrayed,
The healer hung,
The saviour
Torn.

Rich autumn Christ
The hill is climbed,
The hate disarmed,
The fear is gone,
The battle
Won.

Dear autumn Christ,
The rose-red blood,
The rowan tree,
God's heaven aflame
In love
For me.

By Peter Matheson

Tell them we love them...

Peter Matheson

6/10/1938–14/4/2025



Thinking of Peter, one of the first of many adjectives that comes to mind is “presence”. Physical yes, because he was tall and imposing, but not in a domineering way. His welcoming smile and laughter lines precluded any such imposition. He was present to whatever was around, and that attention created and nurtured the passion with which he engaged in life. His commitment to working for a just world, free from the threat of war and violence, and which celebrated creativity, community, beauty and wholeness undergirded everything.

For me he was a kindred spirit whose wonderful Scottish accent was undimmed by time in Germany, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. The Iona Community and what it stood for was part of his formation and lay behind the years he spent developing the St Martin Island community in the beautiful long sea inlet that is the Otago harbour. It was wonderful to go and spend time there with him in the 1990s and sense the connection, carried over the water, to the other tiny island that is Iona.

Peter's faith had formed and went on forming him. He delighted in great liturgy and music, prayer and thought-provoking preaching. The Iona Community liturgies and hymns spoke to him deeply as the words of Shirley Erena Murray and Colin Gibson, New Zealanders.

Tribute from Mary Pearson, Australia

One of Peter's most significant contributions to Scottish civic and public life, almost forgotten by many here now, was his absolutely central role in the establishment of the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Resource Centre (now Peace and Justice Scotland). Set up in 1980 under the auspices of the then Scottish Churches Council and the Scottish Catholic Bishops' Conference with miniscule funding, Peter was the first Chairman of a small management group of committed activists. I was the Centre's first Co-ordinator.

Building from nothing and moving house several times, the Centre and its volunteers became a real resource for schools, churches, community groups and individuals committed to justice-seeking, peace-making and active non-violence. It has remained so for 45 years. Peter was a supportive, patient and persuasive chairman - but never so respectable that you could forget his revolutionary soul. When he moved back to his beloved Aotearoa, his friends and colleagues knew why he was going, but we missed him greatly. And I, who knew nothing back then, will always be grateful for his endless encouragement.

Tribute from Kathy Galloway
Edinburgh Peace and justice Resource Centre Co-ordinator 1980-83

A full obituary was published in the [Otago Daily Times](#).