

Prayer for the Pacific islands

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Published in the *Christian Science Sentinel*. December 15, 2003, p. 18

When I visited the islands of the South Pacific as a singer on cruise ships, I expected to bring home memories of golden beaches, palm-fringed lagoons, scented frangipani flowers, and islanders without a care in the world.

Instead, the most vivid picture I gained is of how vast and daunting the Pacific Ocean is – and how tiny and vulnerable the islands are in comparison.

Recently the *7.30 Report* program on Australia's ABC television reminded me of this when it featured comments by reverend Tofiga Falani of the Tuvalu Congregational Christian Church. Visiting Australia to highlight the plight of the 12,000 citizens in the tiny Pacific nation of Tuvalu, Falani explained that islanders are concerned that their very survival is being threatened. Global warming, they believe, is causing a rise in the sea level.

Tuvalu is a low-lying territory of nine isolated coral atolls covering about 29 square kilometers [ten square miles], and is a mere 5 meters [16 feet] above sea level. Storm surges have already flooded inland pools of fresh water and contaminated crops with salt water. One small islet has totally disappeared (see www.tuvaluislands.com).

When I first heard this, I wondered what hope the Tuvaluan people had of surviving the next cyclone season. Could anything stop the ocean from swamping them?

Then I remembered a friend's experience that gave me reason for hope. One summer, an intense low pressure system formed off the east coast of Australia. Heavy rain fell for days. Late one night my telephone rang. The caller said, "Please help me." She lived alongside a river. The river level had been rising, and the water was now lapping at her doorstep. "If the rain doesn't stop right away, my whole house will be flooded. Do something!" she pleaded.

As a Christian Science practitioner, I'm used to being called upon to pray for people in trouble. Normally I don't hesitate to get busy praying. But this time I felt overwhelmed. So I asked God to help me. I said, "Dear Father, how do I pray about this?" Almost immediately, fragments of a sentence came to mind: "... said to the proud wave, 'Thus far and no farther.'" I knew exactly where they came from.

Grabbing a copy of *Science and Health*, I found the complete statement. "Adhesion, cohesion, and attraction are properties of Mind [God]. They belong to divine Principle, and support the equipoise of that thought-force, which launched the earth in its orbit and said to the proud wave, 'Thus far and no farther'" (p. 124).

These words reminded me that divine Spirit had created the universe and was holding it together. God's creation was in perfect order. The earth, sun, moon, and stars were all held in their places. The oceans – vast as they were – didn't overflow the continents. This wasn't just good luck. The laws of God, which governed the creation of the universe, continued to sustain, manage, and control it.

If this was true, I thought, the divine law of order could also be applied to a river out of control. So I prayed along these lines: "Dear Father, this woman isn't at the mercy of rising river levels. Everything is under Your control. She is safe in Your care. I believe this with my whole heart." And I did.

In the morning the woman called and thanked me for my prayers. She said that thirty minutes after we had talked, the rain eased and then stopped. Within the next hour the river level started going down. Not one drop of water had entered her home.

Now, I know a river isn't the same as an ocean. But in praying for the Tuvaluan people, I've realized that the divine laws that govern the universe and helped my friend during the storm are in operation now. These islanders can stay safe. The Creator is with them and does not leave them at the mercy of cyclones or rising tides. Such prayer is a powerful force for good. I've been saved many times in life-threatening situations. I've experienced God's protecting power. And I've learned not to see any situation as too difficult for God to solve. Even in the face of earthquakes, bushfires, hurricanes, or floods, we don't have to feel helpless or hopeless. Prayer can and does help people remain safe.