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Growing up in Naroi village on Moala Island, Rev Waqairatu was encouraged to become a minister by his father and grandfather and completed his secondary education at Central Fijian School – now Sila Central High – less than two kilometres from the Davuilevu Theological College where he would eventually study for the ministry and in due course became Principal.

During the recent Methodist Conference in Suva Rev Waqairatu was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Vision University in the USA.

This year sees the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma celebrating the 50th anniversary of becoming an independent conference.

In a symbol of his humility Rev Waqairatu had planned to celebrate the anniversary by washing the feet of the superintendent ministers and lay leaders of the Church's 55 divisions. He was intending to ask these leaders to go back to their divisions and continue the process until every church had held a washing of the feet, as a sign of humility, servant hood and seeking forgiveness.

UnitingWorld understands that, according to the procedures of the Methodist Church, the former President Rev Ame Tugae will act as the Interim President until a new President is elected.

UnitingWorld Associate Director Church Solidarity (Pacific) Mr Bruce Mullan said Rev Waqairatu's death was an absolute tragedy for the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma.

"To be struck down just as he was leading the church in the changing context that is Fiji is a huge loss both to the Methodist and the ecumenical movement in Fiji," Mr Mullan said.

"People in Fiji, Australia and across the Pacific will be saddened by this news and the Uniting Church in Australia offers its prayers and deep condolences to the family and to our Partner Church in Fiji."

*Kerry Enright*

*(<http://www.unitingworld.org.au/uniting-church-saddened-by-death-of-fiji-methodist-president-waqairatu/>)*