

National Council of Churches in Australia [NCCA] 9th Forum

24-27 June 2016 in North Sydney, NSW

Theme: Remember, Rejoice, Renew

Report from Ms Jill Gallio, President and Ms Geraldine Hawkes, Ecumenical Facilitator, SA Council of Churches

The NCCA is 19 Christian Churches gathered from across Australia, who have embarked on a pilgrimage together. They share a common future, convinced that the future of Christians in Australia lies together, not in separation. Every three years they gather at a Forum to review and to consider next steps on their journey together.

This sense of pilgrimage was reflected in the morning **Bible Studies**, centred on the Road to Emmaus, and helped shape conversations in each ensuing session. This assisted all to recognise NCCA as a place of gathering for the Member Churches to grow and learn on their journey towards more visible unity in Christ, as well as actually working together in specific areas as needed.



Rev Dr Jane Lee-Barker

The Forum included time for reporting on various areas. Rev Dr Jane Lee-Barker, a member of SACC Community for Local Ecumenism, and appointed by the Anglican Church to **NCCA Faith and Unity Commission**, shared news of the work of the Commission during the last three years. A major focus for Faith & Unity Commission has been the WCC convergence text ***The Church: Towards a Common Vision***.

One example of their work on this text was a **Pre-Forum** event, in partnership with *Centre for Ecumenical Studies Winter School*. Students and church leaders participated in presentations and conversations to delve into the text and consider *What is the greatest challenge for your church? What in your tradition could change to realise that hope?* Geraldine Hawkes had been invited to introduce the document and she led it by acknowledging that the paper invited people to remember that ‘the Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world’, and to consider the disposition needed to enter more fully into the conversation. Jill noted that many of the thoughts and ideas shared resonated across all the Churches. And she reflected on the question posed regarding the frequently expressed use of images such as mirrors, kaleidoscopes, colour and beauty and then all pondered - *What about those who are blind?*

SACC is keen to encourage a deeper reading of the paper so that the Churches in SA may together continue to grow more closely towards a common vision. More soon.

During the Forum, we heard from works such as the **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)**, **Safe Church Network**, **Eco-Mission Network** - “it’s God’s agenda not ours”, and, “what would the world look like based on God’s values” - and from **National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission [NATSIEC]** – with Ms Rose Elu [Anglican] describing what it is like to be living the effect of climate change in the Torres Strait and what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders could contribute to the conversation on Eco-Mission.

We heard also of the growth of **Act for Peace** and the increased funds raised, including the current Ration Challenge which had reached almost two million dollars by the last day of the Forum.

On the Sunday evening, the Member Churches installed and welcomed a new President, The **Rt Revd Philip Huggins** [Anglican]. Rev'd Dr Mike Semmler [Lutheran, from South Australia] stepped down, having served as President for the past three years.

During the service of installation, the **Congregational Federation of Australia** and **Uniting Church in Australia** took another step of affirming commitment to covenanting together by agreeing together 'to invite and welcome members of each other's church to share in the Eucharist according to pastoral need'.



Rev Dr Andrew Dutney [Immediate Past President of the Uniting Church in Australia],
Dr Joseph Goodall [Head of the Congregational Federation], and
Rev Dr Mike Semmler [Lutheran – outgoing President of NCCA]

See **Australian Churches Covenanting Together**
<http://www.ncca.org.au/all-documents/29-australian-churches-covenanting-together/file>

There was a high level of interest in the planned International Conference on **Receptive Ecumenism**, to be held 6-9 November 2017 in Canberra, and wide recognition of dialogue as being not just an exchange of ideas but also an exchange of gifts.

A new **Constitution** was accepted which will assist the Member Churches of NCCA in their greater participation and decision making on the shared journey.

Other **South Australians** present at some or all of the Forum included Rev Dr Jane Lee-Barker [Anglican] Ms Jo Jordan [Quakers], Bishop John Henderson, Pastor Neville Otto and Rev Dr Mike Semmler [Lutheran], Rev Dr Andrew Dutney [Uniting]. We are sure each of them will have their own reflections on the Forum. Fuller reports and feedback from NCCA can be obtained in the next few weeks through www.ncca.org.au

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the 9th NCCA Forum and to experience the prayer, reflection and conversations as each church continues to participate with an attitude of humility, to act in ways that are not dualistic or divisive, to speak well always of 'the other', and to remain faithful to the prayer of Jesus that 'all may be one'.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to see the wider picture of ecumenism nationally and in the world and some of the really worthwhile causes that the NCCA supports and gives voice to. It was particularly good to meet many of the people that I have heard about and to network with many others from varying Christian denominations. It is indeed important to receive from the other and allow their perspectives to widen ours and to also be in solidarity with them as the voice and face of Jesus in a world that is crying out for such love and care," reflected Jill Gallio.

Ms Jill Gallio, President
Ms Geraldine Hawkes, Ecumenical Facilitator
SA Council of Churches

6 July 2016