

Local Ecumenism into the Future

Reflections on Adelaide based SA Council of Churches Ecumenical Conversations* in September 2011

What inspires and motivates people in their experience of Local Ecumenism?

Listening to one another and being open to each other.

Participants expressed great enjoyment in the experience of just being together as people from differing parts of the Christian Faith traditions. There was a sense that we gain something from listening to one another, and being open to each. Learning and hope were the major benefits named. People appreciated others whom they experienced as mentors and leaders in the shared journey, and the sense of exploring what it is to be church through these shared experiences. Discovering that others can help us and inspire us.

The structured groups that happen at a local level

Whether it was ministers circles, inter church councils or the array of local shared activities mentioned below, participants noted the importance of having structured activities that enabled them to share in ecumenical activity. Often local ecumenism assists the links between the past and future experiences of shared ministry in local areas.

The large array of creative local ecumenical activities happening at a local level

Amongst the people involved in the conversations, the following local ecumenical activities were named as some of the creative enjoyable involvements currently on offer:-

- Churches working together for the Norwood Christmas Pageant, and activities in the Blackwood-Mitcham , and Seaford areas.
- Various study and reflection groups together
- Raising money together for the Christmas Bowl overseas aid fund via Badge Day and local congregational collections
- Global Ecumenical Involvement
- Ecumenical Services such as Pentecost, Easter, Palm Sunday, Anzac Day.
- Post Disaster Ministry
- The Celebration of Refugee and Migrant Sunday, and National Reconciliation Sunday
- Providing breakfasts and morning teas for local teachers in local schools
- Teaching from leaders from diverse traditions
- Involvement in Multi Faith activities
- Praying together and for each other
- World Day of Prayer Gatherings
- Kids hope ministry
- Kairos prison ministry
- Collaborating to support people in detention centres and in community detention, and to pray for people who are detained.
- Church partnerships re Food Coops, drop-in centres, community meals.
- Close collaboration and joint ministries especially in Rural Areas.



Encouragement, Vision and Hope

These more elusive motivations are found in the relationships between people from differing Christian faith traditions as they interact locally. People named that sharing things together assisted them to have a common vision, agreements around how to go about mission in a local region, and support for being church in a secular society. There was a sense particularly for people from smaller congregations that it is possible to achieve things together that would be impossible alone; that more was given by the churches to the larger society through working together locally.

Supporting Christian Pastoral Care Workers in local schools

Participants appreciated the way that working together, local inter church councils and other incorporated regional ecumenical bodies, could be involved with the Schools Ministry Group to assist Schools and the Federal Government to provide pastoral care for students and staff; local ecumenical effort supporting local children and the local community. These activities provided a range of options in terms of involvement; from raising or administering money to baking food, to being support people for a local CPS worker.

What challenges are there in contemporary Local Ecumenism?

Tribalism, misunderstanding, mistrust, intolerance. A number of examples were shared that highlighted the challenges of living with diversity. For example, diversity over views concerning sexuality, small churches vs big churches, churches keen to share together vs churches keen to promote themselves, denominational, liturgical and theological differences that inhibit and sometimes spoil a shared reality.

Pessimism and lack of enthusiasm. Some participants are experiencing a “tiredness” with Ecumenical ideals. They sense a lack of connection between churches and are disappointed there is a lack of promotion of positive events, activities and gatherings.

Age group considerations. Many regions have older people involved ecumenically but find it hard to involve younger people.

Imbalance between clergy and lay involvement. In various places the ecumenical involvement is weighted too much in one direction or the other. In some circumstances the information flow from the official local ecumenical group does not get through to the local congregations.

Busyness, survival and limited resources. The survival drive in some situations inhibits ecumenical involvement, as does the overload of involvement in committees and meetings, and the drain of people and financial resources. Many smaller congregations have limited resources to share.

Compliance Issues for supporting School’s pastoral care can distract from other ecumenical activity. Sometimes the work load supporting school ministry takes up most of the available time and energy.

Bilateral Dialogues between denominations are not always relevant to the local ecumenical scene. Participants noted that bilateral relations between denominations are often disconnected from the multi denominational local ecumenical experience and from local input.

Lack of prayerfulness for each other. Many of the abovementioned realities act against a shared prayerfulness and a mutually caring prayerfulness.

Other suggestions to enhance the future of Local Ecumenism in South Australia

- Explore ways that God may be leading us to express ecumenism differently.
- Work to develop some new Ecumenical Direction now and find ways to re-energize the local ecumenical movement.
- Continue to create opportunities for dialogue and listening to the other.
- Encourage shared activities and relationship building.
- Encourage freedom of creative ideas around ecumenism.
- Develop resources that assist congregations to be inspired to be involved in local ecumenism.
- Disseminate contemporary interpretations of ecumenism and denominationalism.
- Link ecumenical endeavours with multi faith endeavours.
- Promote positive messages about people of all faiths that counter some of the anti-faith messages of contemporary society.
- Encourage local groups to work together to address local community needs.
- Encourage groups to consider local ecumenical post-prison support ministries, especially to meet accommodation needs.
- Find ways to lower the compliance load on local ecumenical groups associated with Schools ministry.
- Encourage a creative approach to the International Day of Prayer for Peace – Sept 21

* Hosted by SACC Committee for Local Ecumenism with a range of people from inter church councils, ministers circles and local congregations, on 21 and 23 September 2011

