

Ecumenical Relationships Follow-up Conversation

Notes

The meeting was held across three sessions to enable people to maximise participation.

- Monday July 27th 6-7pm
- Tuesday July 28th 3-4pm
- Friday July 31st 10-11am

Each meeting began with shared Acknowledgement of Country

Each group discussed two questions:

1. In our current COVID-19 context, what are the ecumenical engagements we are having? What are the shared challenges and learnings from our ecumenical partners?
2. What are ways we can work together across Synods and Assembly to better share in our ecumenical work?

Our COVID-19 Context:

In response to the first question there were a range of experiences across the groups.

- Some Synods are gathering for worship now while others are still meeting virtually.
- Some members have felt that this period has caused churches and communities to focus inwards with a stronger emphasis on survival rather than looking outward ecumenically.
- Some reflected that the virtual meeting space had facilitated more opportunities for connecting in both ecumenical and interfaith contexts.
- Where conversations are happening, receptive ecumenism is a very helpful model for engagement
- In SA the Roman Catholic – UCA Dialogue has been working on a joint response to the Statement from the Heart. They are producing a resource called “Crying out” which will be available on the dialogue website <http://sadiologuercuc.org/>
- Qld is active in conversations about the impacts of COVID-19 on places of worship and has been having ecumenical and interfaith conversations about what it means to be present in the current context
- Qld has also been in conversation with Trinity Theological College on the document from Ray Williamson, *Bishop Michael Putney Memorial Lecture (2015): Forming the Ecumenical Mind Being Church in a Polarised World*.
- Ecumenical bodies overseas (WCC, WMC, CCA for example) seem to have been very busy during COVID-19. This is not as clearly seen here in Australia.
- NSWEC has arranged some online ecumenical events
- Disaster Response Chaplaincy one area of focus
- Challenge for local ministers to encourage and themselves be active in ecumenical initiatives when all are very stretched, and some are part time.

- National dialogues remain important because they provide a place for sharing and dialogue between churches when important and difficult issues arise
- There is energy for ecumenism in some non-traditional areas. For example, “Love makes a way” has engaged younger UCA members and has been a highly energising.

Possible areas of collaboration:

A range of suggestions were put forward.

- Collect and share state-based ecumenical bodies minutes and newsletters.
- Communications between synod groups should be enhanced. Vital that we meet together and listen to the wider ecumenical work that is going on.
- It is important as a Church that when we are working on issues ecumenically that we spend time to reflect theologically on the issues and why we are working on them, and why we are working ecumenically.
- Some topical resources are available, for example reconciliation with First Nations, which provide excellent entry points for ecumenical and interfaith conversations.
- We need to jointly facilitate conversation on the following:
 - As the Uniting Church experiences competing pressures on resources and time, how do we best undertake ecumenical activities?
 - How do we educate, engage and excite younger members of the UCA about ecumenical relationships?
- The document from Ray Williamson, *Bishop Michael Putney Memorial Lecture (2015): Forming the Ecumenical Mind Being Church in a Polarised World*. Would be a good conversation starter for the conversations mentioned above. We agreed to circulate this document in pdf format after the meeting.
- The Assembly is planning further gatherings like the ones we have been having later in 2020.

In addition:

The Assembly is planning to create a shared ecumenical calendar in which international, national and state-based key dates and events are recorded and shared

The Assembly, through the Seeking Common Ground Circle is already communicating some stories of ecumenical activities across synods and local congregations. Participants in these conversations are urged to contribute to this.

The Assembly is hoping to use the virtual engagement with which we are all becoming familiar to host conversations on important ecumenical issues.

The Assembly Standing Committee has taken the decision that there will be no international partners or international ecumenical guests at the 16th Assembly. Discussion are underway to establish a number of virtual engagements with ecumenical visitors to the 16th Assembly, some of which will be for members of the Assembly and some of which will be open to the wider church.

Resources and Communications:

Assembly staff are compiling a list of electronic communications to which people can subscribe. The Assembly welcomes contributions to building up this resource. They are as follows:

International Bodies:

- World Council of Churches
- World Council of Reformed Churches
- World Methodist Council
- Global Christian Forum
- Christian Conference of Asia
- Pacific Conference of Churches

National and state-based bodies:

- National Council of Churches in Australia
- State-based ecumenical communications

Other faiths communications