

# NDCU Newsletter

No 1. Advent 2019

Biennial Newsletter of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity, Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **NATIONAL DIALOGUE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

The inaugural meeting of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity was held in Wellington on February 25, 2016. Three Churches, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia, the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa and the Roman Catholic Church, combined to constitute the new ecumenical body and approve the constitution.

Greetings were received from the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit: “We often say that unity is a gift and calling and you know this well. The NDCU is a new expression of that gift for Aotearoa New Zealand... This space of dialogue gives a new dawn for ecumenism in your country. May you welcome this possibility and allow the light that comes from encounter amongst your churches to guide you on a path of peace together...”

The Reverend John Roberts who had guided the establishment of the new ecumenical body shared learnings from the past. One: take accountability to member churches seriously, and avoid marginalising church leaders. Two: Make sure that Faith and Order matters, especially the unity of the church, are given priority. Three: Keep the agreed statement “Towards a Theology of Christian Unity” to the fore.

After the inaugural meeting, at 5 p.m. a liturgy of celebration and thanksgiving was held in the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart with three church leaders presiding: John Cardinal Dew, Archbishop Philip Richardson and past Methodist President John Roberts. Presbyterian minister the Rev. Kerry Enright preached the sermon.

To acclamation, the Presbyterian Church was received into full membership at the annual forum of NDCU in February 2018. The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends are actively considering whether to become full members of the Dialogue.

This Newsletter will report on developments related to dialogue between the churches. The focus will be on work toward Christian unity. It will feature from time to time prayer and research, statements and initiatives that promote the unity of the church in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. In this respect ecumenism is understood as the quest for the unity of the church to serve the unity of creation.

## **JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

After decades of prayer and theological conversation between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith was signed between the two churches in 1999. The core doctrine that divided the Western Church at the Reformation is no longer in dispute. Since then the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion have signed up to the statement.

A consultation was held in March 2019 at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana on what the Joint Declaration might mean for future relationships between the five world communions that have signed up to the statement. In the light of this most significant ecumenical breakthrough, how might relations between the churches change? How can they make more visible the new levels of trust and friendship that have emerged? And how can they put their powerful message of reconciliation at the service of a deeply divided world?

On the opening day of the consultation presentations from the five world communions reflected on how their commitment to begin “always from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division” can help them find solutions to remaining obstacles, including recognition of ministry and eucharistic sharing. In a concluding statement, participants highlighted the way in which the JDDJ process led to the overcoming of centuries-old controversies. They also mentioned how its method of

differentiating consensus, which allows for core agreement while maintaining different confessional expressions, can be used to deal with past, present and future challenges relating to doctrinal and ethical questions.

The general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation Rev. Dr Martin Junge observed, “we no longer look at each other from the perspective of what that church is lacking, but rather how it is an effective instrument to proclaim the gospel of Christ, calling people to faith, hope and love.” Drawing out the implications of justification by faith for our day, the LWF developed its theme for its twelfth Assembly: “Salvation not for sale, human beings not for sale, creation not for sale!”

*(LWF Communications)*

### **WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

In June a service of worship was held in the Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Auckland. Anglican, Coptic, Eritrean Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic church leaders participated in the liturgy. The theme for this year’s week of prayer for Christian unity was chosen by the churches in Indonesia, developing a teaching from the book of Deuteronomy: “Justice, only justice, you shall pursue.”

Bishop Patrick Dunn, Catholic bishop of Auckland, preached the sermon. He noted that it was a beautiful thing for Christians to gather to pray for unity. Exploring Jesus’ teaching in Luke 4: 14 – 21 he reminded the congregation that all mission has its origins in God. “All through scripture we know that God constantly reminds Israel that they are to welcome strangers, and to be kind to captives. Because they are reminded – don’t you forget, you were once strangers in Egypt, in Babylon. You were once captives. And they knew that God sides with those who are on the margins. God is the defender of the widow, of the orphan. God stands with the stranger and the captive, and he expects us to do likewise.”

Bishop Dunn referenced some lines from a work known as “The Prayer of Oscar Romero”, which was actually written by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden:

“We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work ...

This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds that are already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest,

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.”

*(New Zealand Catholic October 2019)*

### **THE CHURCH: TOWARDS A COMMON VISION**

The Roman Catholic Church has presented a formal response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, (2013) the fruit of three decades of international ecumenical conversations about what it means to be church. The convergence statement harvests the fruits of ecumenical dialogue, surveys progress made in understanding between the churches and outlines what may be said to be held in common. It represents remarkable advances in ecumenical ecclesiology. Churches were invited to respond to the

new statement in much the same way as they did in regard to an earlier landmark document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (1982).

Episcopal conferences of the Roman Catholic Church, theologians, academic study groups and ecclesial movements reported their responses to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. After receiving these reports The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity prepared a document. They observed that “The response shows that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* synthesizes well the growing consensus in the fields of ecclesiology in the current ecumenical dialogue. At the same time it points out various aspects which need further reflection on the nature and mission of the church, as well as on the vision of its unity.”

Welcoming with gratitude the response of the Roman Catholic Church, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said, “The response is a sign of how we are walking, working and praying together. We have more to do, and more need to pray for the unity of the church. But we are committed to make it a unity that can be sustained in its diversity and mutual accountability.”

The Rev. Dr Susan Durber, moderator of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, said that the response from the Roman Catholic Church has been received with great joy. “It is encouraging to read a response that affirms how far we have come in common understanding and that exhibits such strong commitment to continuing on the journey towards visible unity, promising “to spare no effort.”

(WCC Communications November 2019)

*Terry Wall was awarded a WCC scholarship to study at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago and completed a masters in Theology there in 1977. For seventeen years he was convenor of the Faith & Order Committee of the Methodist Church during which time he was involved in bilateral dialogues with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. In 1993 Terry represented the Methodist Church of New Zealand at the 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Faith & Order in Santiago de Compostela. He was convenor of the CCANZ Unity Programme for five years. He holds a doctorate in Ministry Studies from the Melbourne College of Divinity. It was a privilege for him to be invited to prepare the first draft of the NDCU statement “Towards a Theology of Christian Unity.” For two years he was acting secretary of NDCU. A committed ecumenist, now retired, Terry lives in Tuakau.*

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*Wishing you a blessed festive season as we  
celebrate the birth of Christ and look forward  
to a New Year.*