

# NDCU Newsletter

Newsletter of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity Aotearoa New Zealand  
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We have all been adjusting to life under lockdown. For some it has made little difference to their lives. For others it has involved great upheaval and uncertainty. Facing the virus has reminded us of deep questions about our lives: ‘am I my brother or sister’s keeper?’ Does our individualism serve us well in this new context? How can we shape our lives so that the common good is served? Radical interdependence has become inescapable. Will this insight break open the way we do economics and international relations? Can we dare to act with a new reverence for creation and abandon exploitative attitudes? This moment can be one of great opportunity holding the promise of re-envisioning a common future.

## NDCU Annual Forum 2020

The annual forum of NDCU was held on 27<sup>th</sup> February at Loaves and Fishes Hall, Thorndon, Wellington. Representatives of the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches gathered, along with observers from the Religious Society of Friends and the Salvation Army. Also present as observers were Bible Society of New Zealand, Christian World Service, the Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network, Inter Church Tertiary Chaplaincy Council and Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand. Apologies from Inter Church Hospital Chaplaincy Board were received. Presbyterian Moderator the Rev Fakaofu Kaio led devotions on Psalm 133 – ‘Where there is dew, there is life.’

The forum resolved that NDCU become an Incorporated Society and be registered as a Charitable Organisation with the Charities Commission. Ray Coster reported on representing three member churches on the Central Committee of the WCC. He mentioned plans for the next Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in September 2021, WCC’s focus on reconciliation on the Korean peninsula and conflict resolution between Palestine and Israel, and many other unity and justice concerns. Neels Janse van Rensburg spoke on the work of the Bible Society.

The society will celebrate its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021.

Election of officeholders: John Cardinal Dew was elected chairperson, Prince Devanandan secretary and Ray Coster treasurer. The afternoon was devoted to reports from the four churches on their engagement in ecumenical dialogue. Anglican – Philip Richardson, Methodist – Terry Wall, Presbyterian – Fakaofu Kaio and Roman Catholic – John Dew. The next forum will be held at Loaves and Fishes, Thorndon, Wellington on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

## The Diaconate – Wrestling Together - Tony Franklin-Ross.



Trilateral ecumenical dialogue held at Onehunga in May 2019

In an article *Wrestling with the Diaconate*, Prof Paul Avis suggests, “The diaconate is at the same time the most problematic and the most promising. Some churches have been agonising about what a deacon is, while others have begun to discover what a deacon can be.”

Responding to this challenge, thirteen people from the Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic churches (each having vocational deacons) met over two days in May 2019, at the Onehunga Co-operating Parish, Auckland. So arose the first ‘trilateral’ ecumenical dialogue to be held in New Zealand; spearheaded by Rev Tony Franklin-Ross and Rev Dr Trevor Hoggard. The National Dialogue for Christian Unity supported the dialogue as

an expression of ‘receptive ecumenism’; which asks ... what can we learn and receive – and what do we need to learn and receive – with integrity, from other traditions. As such, many insights on ministry and mission were shared, along with some joys and struggles.

Snapshots from some Anglican deacons, shared by the Rev Dr Deborah Broome, included the analogy of “dancing on the edge”, and of being “outward facing and community involved”. Anglican Deacon, the Rev Peter Sykes, working in the hard realities of South Auckland, observed that “often the deacon is visible in the community, whilst being invisible to the Church; but where they do function, they can serve as symbols of prophetic justice and Christian compassion”.

Whereas Catholic Deacon Peter Richardson shared that not all Catholic dioceses have established vocational deacons, and yearns for a national focus and flavour; Methodist Deacon Edna Evans recalled a hope of Methodism in previous years was that every parish would have a deacon, but this did not eventuate. Tony reflects, “diaconal ministry and mission still presents what could be exciting possibilities for the future role of the Methodist church in many communities.”

The diversity and a little confusion about diaconal ministry both within and between denominations, might always be part of the picture for those who work at the edge – in itself fostering creative possibilities. Therefore, the trilateral concluded that we need to keep the ‘receptive model’ going by continuing to learn from across our three churches, and challenge ourselves to ecumenically enrich our diaconal ministries.

In March 2020 a meeting of the Methodist-Roman Catholic bilateral dialogue commended this trilateral dialogue and gave support for it to continue. This was echoed by a meeting of the chairpersons of the three New Zealand bilateral dialogues (Anglican-Methodist, Methodist-Roman Catholic, Anglican-Roman Catholic). Feedback is that the event interested deacons, and gave space for the useful sharing of common concerns for the formation of people into the diaconate, shared experiences and expressions of practical diaconal ministry, and the continuing formation and support by the respective denominations of their deacons. This presents a good example of the Receptive Ecumenism methodology and a project in creating a space for listening to each other.

We propose an ongoing theological exchange on understandings and nature of the diaconate as a ministry, and furthering our ecumenical co-operation in diaconal ministry and mission. We would like to enhance this expression of mission in local communities, and explore a further trilateral meeting - maybe in 2021.

Source; *Touchstone*

### Archbishop Welby visits Geneva

The first Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in Amsterdam in 1948. As part of the 70th anniversary of that historic assembly, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, gave an address in Geneva in February 2018. In the address he made some important observations on Faith and Order issues related to the quest for Christian unity. The heart of his approach is briefly summarised here.

He insisted that ecclesiology always begins with the person of Christ. Our divisions are a counter witness and declare that Christ is divided. This fact attracts attention away from the person of Christ to the broken church.

Then he developed an image which holds potential for reflection and transformation. In the past we have seen our separated churches as having frontiers that need to be defended and negotiated. He observed that frontiers provide us with identity – ‘we are not like them.’ “Frontiers imply difference. They say to us that on the other side of the frontier is the ‘other’ – the other person, the other culture, the other race, the other nation, type, sort of person.” We are like a family with broken relationships who may live in the same house but live in separate rooms. This is not normal.

In contrast open borders “allow the other to be part of ourselves. They permit movement and transfer, exhibiting not division but diversity. In their openness, they invite encounter, as opposed to frontiers, which require resilience and courage to cross.” Archbishop Welby went on to say that “the ecclesiology of an open border is to say that we are one with differences – rather than that we are many seeking what it is to be one.” This approach of ‘open borders’ invites us to see ourselves as being one, and then going on to recognise that there are fractures within the oneness. This significant insight calls for a revolution in the way churches see themselves, relate to other traditions and the very agenda of dialogue.

The full text of the address may be found in the *Ecumenical Review* Vol. 70 no. 2 July 2018 p. 370 – 378

### Pope calls for new relation to creation

During his address on the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation* (September 2019) Pope Francis invited participants to “find a naturally beautiful place and think about how God created the universe and declared it good;

then he created human beings and gave them creation ‘as a precious gift’ to safeguard.” He spoke about the way in which selfishness and self-interest have turned it into a place of conflict.

“We have forgotten who we are: creatures made in the image of God, called to dwell as brothers and sisters in a common home. Now is the time to rediscover our vocation as children of God, brothers and sisters, and stewards of creation. Now is the time to repent and be converted. In silence and prayer, people should recognise the beauty that God has created and given to all people, but they should also pause to consider how the choices they make about what to eat, what to buy, how to travel and how they use energy and water impact God’s creation, including people.

Listen especially to young people who are calling on everyone to make ‘courageous decisions’ and undertake ‘prophetic actions’ to fulfil longstanding promises to stop polluting the environment and to protect all life. Let us choose life. Let us say ‘no’ to consumerist greed and to the illusion of omnipotence, for these are the ways of death. May God, the lover of life, grant us the courage to do good without waiting for someone else to begin or until it is too late.”

Source: *The Common Good* No 91, Advent 2019

### Prayer for Archbishops of Aleppo

The acting general secretary of the WCC, the Revd Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, expressed solidarity with those praying for the release of the two archbishops of Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi), from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, and His Eminence Mor Youhanna Gregorios (Ibrahim) from the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The archbishops were abducted on 22 April 2013 by militants in the Syrian Civil War. Many around the world marked the seventh anniversary of the tragic event with services of prayer. “We keep in the communion of prayer with their churches, and we implore God for their return,” said Dr Sauca. “In solidarity with their families, we also express our deep sympathy for their pain and anguish of missing their loved ones for such a length of time.”

Source: *WCC Weekly* 17 April 2020

### Prominent Ecumenical Scholar dies



The Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, 80, died on March 17, 2020. He is mourned by his many friends and colleagues of the World Methodist Council, and the wider ecumenical movement. Well-loved for his leadership and work in many areas, Wainwright served as chair of the World Methodist Council’s Ecumenical Relationships Committee.

For many years until retirement in 2012, Geoffrey was Professor of Systematic Theology at Duke Divinity School. He took a lead in drafting “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry”. (BEM, 1982) He served as a member of the World Council of Churches’ Faith & Order Commission, and co-chaired the dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church (from 1986 to 2011). He was an eminent scholar, having written and edited multiple volumes, including *Eucharist and Eschatology* (1971) and *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (1980) Geoffrey, rest in peace and rise in glory.

### From Rome to Aotearoa - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross (Methodist Church of New Zealand), in his new role as Ecumenical Relations Chair for the World Methodist Council, joined the churches in Rome for their annual observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2020. He reports on his experience.

The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* invites us to gather as Christians to pray with Christ that “they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:21). The Week is traditionally held in January between the feast of St Peter and the feast of St Paul in the northern hemisphere,



and between Ascension and Pentecost in the southern hemisphere. The material can be used for an ecumenical prayer service at any time of the year. The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* has been part of ecumenical spirituality since 1968; its origins date back over 100 years.



There was a rich array of services and opportunities for churches, ministers and members of diverse denominations, to pray together for unity. These ranged from an ecumenical service at the Catholic Beda Pontifical University, a special service led by an ecumenical delegation from Finland, and one held at the Anglican Centre. The week culminated with evening vespers led by Pope Francis in the Basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls. Pope Francis in his homily, said that "hospitality belongs to the tradition of Christian communities and families."

The theme for 2020 was developed by the churches of Malta, taking as a focus 'They showed unusual kindness' (Acts 28:2), which is based on the experience of Paul's shipwreck on Malta. The theme presents obvious connections to the contemporary migrant and refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and worldwide. This story challenges us: do we collude with the cold forces of indifference, or do we show "unusual kindness" and become witnesses of God's loving hope and grace to all people?

Both the *World Day of Prayer* (held in March each year), and the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* are two significant ecumenical acts of prayer by the church worldwide and in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Both continue to work as a key witness - at least in those places where there is an existing custom of doing this, but starting fresh expressions as a new local event in other locations is hard to get underway.

How can denominational leaders, and our ecumenical Dialogues, encourage further uptake of these as local ecumenical events (whether on the suggested dates or at other times during the year)? Can the denominations give higher profile to the resources and ensure they are shared widely? Beyond the traditional format of church services, might there be practical ecumenical expressions of working together as a way of marking the week – for example organising a beach clean-up, tree planting at a nature reserve, youth & young adult events?

The *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* is to be marked in Aotearoa-New Zealand between Ascension and Pentecost, 24 - 31 May. Covid-19 will likely impact its observance this year – however it may be marked in different ways or at a different time. Maybe we can encourage it to be observed in some way in new local contexts for the first time. The theme 'They showed us unusual kindness' might be interpreted afresh as an outcome of our Covid-19 affected lives and communities (secular and religious).

The international resource can be found at the World Council of Churches (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/week-of-prayer>); the New Zealand version can be found on <https://www.aucklandcatholic.org.nz/mission-evangelisation/ecumenism/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2020/>; and collection of resources are being circulated currently ... let's spread the word!

Rev. Tony Franklin-Ross Chairperson - Ecumenical Relationships, World Methodist Council

Newsletter editor: Rev. Dr Terry Wall  
Email address: [lynne.terry.wall@gmail.com](mailto:lynne.terry.wall@gmail.com)