

MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

REFLECTIONS

Daily papers across Australia are becoming shorter, briefer. I often find myself questioning, 'Is it worthwhile buying it?' I like to skim the main pages, checking for Australian and overseas news. Then I read the death notices, do the puzzles, especially Kenken and Sudoku, and occasionally look at the sports pages – if it is cricket season. Then I often read the detailed obituaries!

More often than not I do not know the person who died. Often it can be several weeks since the person has died. But there is something about obituaries that draws me to continue reading them. So often, published obituaries reflect the lives of people who have made very significant contributions to our lives. Rarely does the writer say anything negative about the person.

Recently, I read the obituary of Mark Hertzberg 1924-2015 published in the Sydney Morning Herald: 'He was a truly good man, a man who lived his life in accord with carefully thought-through high principles. Hertzberg brought his keen intellect to bear in all that he did but it was an intellect tempered by great warmth and a generosity of spirit. He was always careful with and concerned for the wellbeing of others.

'Hertzberg provided leadership without being domineering. He always tried to lead by engaging his mind, exploring the issues, gaining a shared understanding, and exercising balanced careful judgment'.

Apart from what was written in the obituary, I know nothing about this man. Whether or not he was a Christian I do not know. What I do sense, though, is that he was a man in whom God's grace was active – and surely God's grace bore fruit. Mark Hertzberg was surely an instrument of God's grace for others. May we, too, be instruments of God's grace for all with whom we meet.

Violence against women and Franciscan Response

Like most of us, I receive emails from surprising sources. At times, I delete them without reading them. Recently, I received one from the Association of the Franciscan Families of India (AFFI), an association having around fifty thousand members. Consistent with the Franciscan charism that promotes commitment to the welfare of the least and the last, delegates of AFFI met in late September to focus on *Violence against women and Franciscan Response*. They considered ten problems and developed action and strategies to overcome them: 1. *Abortion, Infanticide, and Female Foeticide*; 2. *Child Abuse*; 3. *Child Marriage*; 4. *Child Labour*; 5. *Eye teasing*; 6. *Domestic Violence*; 7. *Sexual harassment in work places*; 8. *Trafficking of women and children*; 9. *Unemployment of women*; 10. *Alcohol and drug addiction of men*.

Each of these headings covered a range of activities. Surely a multi-faceted approach will achieve an enormous amount of good for women. May their endeavours bear fruit.

NEWS

Responding to persecution in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East

The NCCA echoes the sentiments of the WCC in calling for peace in the Middle East, offering prayerful support for the peoples of Palestine and Israel. (For more information, see <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-expresses-concern-over-renewed-violence-in-jerusalem>).

On a practical level in Australia, Act for Peace (AfP) is pursuing a three-pronged strategy in response to persecution by ISIS and other militant groups in the Middle East, involving as much support as possible for:

1. refugee resettlement or asylum in Australia by Australian churches;
2. Action by Churches Together emergency assistance for displaced Syrians and Iraqis; and
3. those still facing persecution

We now have two new grants for which we are able to invite proposals from any interested organisation or

groups of organisations. These are:

- a. \$100,000 for 'Syrian and/or Iraqi refugee resettlement or asylum in Australia by Australian churches'; and
- b. \$250,000 to 'reduce Christian and other persecution in Middle Eastern places of militant influence, especially Syria and Iraq'.

We seek to make the initial proposal process as open and simple as possible, while still ensuring that successful proposals are able to comply with standard humanitarian and development policy requirements. We are calling for 2-4 page initial proposals for either a. or b. above by 1 December 2015.

There is intentionally no form to complete for initial proposals and the amount requested can be for all or part the amount available. Applicants may submit as many proposals as they wish. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries. Application/queries to info@actforpeace.org.au. See also detailed letter attached.

NCCA Business and Finance Director

I am pleased to announce that Deirdre Ashe has been appointed Business and Finance Director of NCCA. Deirdre is currently working in Asia and will finish her current position and return to Australia at the end of November. A fuller introduction to Deirdre will be provided in the next newsletter.

Australian Representative on Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

I congratulate Bishop Huggins who has just been appointed to the Executive Committee of the CCA for the next five years. Bishop Huggins will serve on the 21-person program committee which will look at four key program priorities including 'Mission in Unity and Contextual Theology', 'Ecumenical Leadership Formation and Ecumenical Spirituality', 'Building Peace and Moving beyond Conflicts' and 'Prophetic Diakonia and Advocacy'. The first meeting of the newly constituted Program Committee will be held in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 1 to 3 December 2015.

Religious Freedom

The NCCA has responded to the invitation from the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Tim Wilson, to provide input on the issues which should be considered and prioritised during discussions on religious freedom in a submission on 25 September 2015. It is important for the NCCA to be part of these ongoing conversations.

Congregational Federation of Australia

When I joined the Congregational Federation of Australia at Worship, celebrated by Rev'd Chris Walker of the Uniting Church in Australia, I was delighted to take the greetings of the NCCA. It was a significant celebration of two member churches ***Covenanting Together***.

The Declaration of Intent in ***Covenanting Together*** states: *We believe that ... we are being blessed to witness the action of the Spirit in drawing the Churches in a common search for a fuller expression of unity.*



L: Dr Joe Goodall, Moderator of the Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand (CFANZ) listens as Sr Elizabeth Delaney sgs addresses the congregation. R: Newly elected leadership team of the CFANZ.

In my address I noted "Today, you affirm the action of God's holy Spirit who has drawn your churches to

welcome each other at the table of the Eucharist.

“It is so easy to sign a document – and allow it to stand. In your commitment to each other, ‘to invite and welcome members of each other’s church to share in the Eucharist according to pastoral need’ you remind the NCCA member churches that this document contained a pledge *to continue to discuss ... the possibilities for further engagement in ecumenical partnership* and *to explore such further steps as will be necessary to make more clearly visible the unity of all Christian people in this country.* **Covenanting Together** is a living document.”

OUR WORKS

ACT FOR PEACE Christmas Bowl Appeal

A long-lasting and vital link between those who have enough and those who have too little.

The Christmas Bowl appeal is a cherished tradition amongst our family of churches in Australia. It began on Christmas Day 1949, when a minister named Rev Frank Byatt in Victoria placed a simple empty bowl on the table before him. He humbly asked his friends and family to contribute what they felt the cost of the meal had been.

Rev Byatt asked that they consider their own good fortune in being able to share a Christmas meal together in comfort and safety. And he invited them to share God’s blessings of love and friendship in the form of a gift to help people who had fled the horrors of World War Two and were suffering as refugees.

Today, 2,000 churches from 19 denominations come together every year to share this special tradition and help the world’s most vulnerable. This invitation to Australian Christians to stand by men, women and children living through conflict and displacement is, sadly, more important than ever.



In past years, we’ve reached out together to ease the suffering of those who lost their homes in the Boxing Day Tsunami and those starving during the Ethiopian famine. This year, we’re helping families who have fled terrible fighting in Southern Sudan. In 2015 alone, more than 200,000 people have crossed the border. Many are desperately trying to keep their children healthy while living in squalid, overcrowded refugee camps.

Clean water - something that we take so much for granted - can mean life or death for these refugees.

The Christmas Bowl appeal is our way of forging a loving connection between our Christian community here in Australia and people around the world who are experiencing dreadful hardship and suffering.

If you would like to read more about the Christmas Bowl appeal or if you would like to take part, please come and visit www.actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl

RON WILSON ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP FUND

The Reverend Chris Bedding is an Anglican Priest in Perth, WA. Earlier this year the NCCA awarded him a grant from the Ron Wilson Ecumenical Leadership Fund to undertake the three month continuing education program at Tantur Ecumenical Institute. This is his first report from the Holy Land.

A meal at Tantur Ecumenical Institute is never dull! You might break bread with a rabbinical student or have a beer with a biblical scholar. Graduate students chat with nuns on sabbatical, while Baptist seminarians quiz a visiting author. Palestinian staff members joke with a Mexican priest. It’s an experience that would be hard to replicate anywhere else.

Tantur is a place of ecumenical engagement, where people come to listen attentively to the scriptures, the land and the people. Thanks to a grant from the Ron Wilson Ecumenical Leadership Fund, I am participating in their three-month continuing education program, alongside an eclectic group of church leaders from around the world.

As an Anglican priest, when I said I was going to Jerusalem, most people assumed I was going to St George's College. Although well known among Roman Catholics, Tantur has a lower profile in other traditions. St George's is a great place, and I've enjoyed visiting the Cathedral and precinct. But Tantur offers a unique experience, particularly for people committed to ecumenism and social justice.

With a mix of lectures and field trips, a Tantur program aims to expose participants to a wide array of narratives. These perspectives are intriguing and often contradictory. One day we are hearing from a secular Palestinian raised as a Muslim, the next an American-born Israeli Jew. A Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem, a Catholic Archbishop with an expertise in Islam, an elderly Armenian sociologist and a feminist Orthodox Jewish scholar each speak from their particular viewpoint. All of these voices are heard in the context of the land, littered with reminders of occupation past and present.



As I write, there are instances of violence throughout the country. A boy of 13 was killed by an Israeli sniper on a road I walked down the day before. In the Old City of Jerusalem, police and military are highly visible, anxious to avoid another stabbing or shooting. When we open the scriptures, this context provides the lens for our reading and framework for our discernment.

But there's plenty of fun as well. We've been to a Palestinian beer festival and a Tel Aviv beach. We did a cooking class with a group of Muslim women. When we talk about our experience of church, we discover that all our traditions have idiosyncrasies and quirks. We laugh together, and advance the cause of Christian unity that little bit further.

A visit to the Holy Land is a great experience for anyone. But to immerse oneself in this complex environment for three months is a rare blessing. I am so grateful to NCCA and the late Sir Ron Wilson for their foresight in establishing the Ron Wilson Ecumenical Leadership Fund, and I look forward to reporting further on my activities in the months ahead.

INTERFAITH

Youth Parliament of World Religions (Youth PoWR)

A Message to Religious and Civic Leaders as well as a Message to Youth was delivered at the inaugural Youth Parliament of the World's Religions (Youth PoWR) conference held last month. More than 400 young Australians representing diverse religious and cultural backgrounds assembled for this event which was held at the Sydney Baha'i Centre. Speakers came from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu communities.

Youth PoWR is an initiative of the Columban Mission Institute, and this year's event was coordinated by a passionate team of young people representing different religious communities across Sydney. For more information, visit <http://www.columban.org.au/e-news/e-news-vol.8-no.9/columbans-gather-at-youth-parliament-of-religions>.

ECUMENISM IN ACTION

Homelessness- Cana Communities

For 40 years Cana Communities Inc. core mission has been to provide care & support to the most vulnerable members of our society. Cana cares for those suffering from homelessness, mental ill health, drug or alcohol addiction or those who have been incarcerated for long periods of time. We do that through the provision of 3 emergency overnight shelters, 7 longer term homes, an education and personal mentoring program for ex-prisoners, long term unemployed & others who are marginalized, the operation of a significant farm in Sydney's west as well as an extensive community outreach program. According to the City of Sydney Council, Cana is the largest provider of emergency overnight accommodation in Sydney.



Cana Communities is not just a service provider, and instead operates on a relational model and whilst we do provide services such as meals and accommodation, we do so on the proviso that those for whom we care are cared for holistically. That is, each person is individually companioned and a plan is carefully established to best cater for their future.

Cana seeks to address the most significant social issues that Sydney faces, that is, chronic homelessness, entrenched disadvantage, social exclusion, drug & alcohol addiction, mental ill health and recidivism. We cannot solve all of these ills but what

we can do is ensure that the people for whom we care are acknowledged, their value as a human being is recognized and their dignity is restored. Our relational model of care has a 40 year history of success.

Cana is a faith based organization in so far as Cana's mission statement explicitly states that "in companionship with Jesus and inspired by His Gospel we recognise the unique and mysterious value and beauty of each person." However Cana is completely non-denominational in choosing those for whom we care and work. In fact some of our closest working relationships are with the Uniting Church Waterloo and the Anglican Church Central Sydney who both generously provide a space for us to host emergency overnight shelters for the homeless. For more information, visit www.cana.org.au

EVENTS

November	1	All Saints Day
	2	All Souls Day
	29	First Sunday of Advent