

Message from the General Secretary

The Right to Hope

This is the title of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Advent message written on the eve of the climate talks in Paris. It addressed the importance of sharing hope, in the context of the host city's recent terror attacks, the 'green shift' towards climate justice, and the season of Advent.

I was struck by these points:

"Sharing hope is not a matter of mutual psychological and spiritual encouragement. To nurture hope is a fundamental ethical principle in any human relation. It is not a matter of being purely optimistic, or even unrealistic or ignoring risks and problems. It is rather a matter of identifying those realities that are authentic signs of hope. To fail in sustaining one another's hope in any way, or even to destroy the hope of the other, is to take the meaning out of their work or lives. Who has the right to do that?"

"All human beings have a right to hope. Faith in God, who desires fullness of life for all of humanity, is a way to relate to the world as it is with the conviction and the commitment that something more and better is possible than what we immediately can observe."

What amazing challenges these few sentences present to us! In this season of Advent when we think of the hopes of God for our world, for all humanity, we cannot but ask ourselves what we are doing to enkindle, strengthen and restore hope.

During the past year, and for the first time for at least ten years, I have been using public transport every day. Waiting for trains on crowded stations provides me with an opportunity to reflect on the lives of the many people who pass by or who stand with me and wait. One would be rather presumptuous to assume to read their stories from their faces or movements. However, occasionally, one senses that a person has 'done it tough' or is struggling. These encounters are a constant reminder of the hope that Christ offers us – and of his hope for all people.

Waiting for trains is also a reminder that there are many people who wait in hope for the opportunity to travel to a place of greater freedom. So many are not free to choose when to travel or how to travel or where to travel. I think of the people of Palestine-Israel: people waiting for hours in queues just to go to their place of work. I think of refugees and asylum seekers, people who have travelled in perilous situations seeking a better life. I think of the indigenous people of West Papua whose human rights have been restricted seriously. I think of people of the Pacific nations who may be forced to leave their homes because of the effects of climate change

God's love urges us to act and speak for his suffering people.

Ever mindful of those who suffer, may our lives be filled with love, hope and peace. As we reflect on the gifts that God offers us, may we share these gifts with all we encounter.

Elizabeth



Heads of Christian Churches offer Christmas messages

The NCCA website features Christmas greetings from a number of Heads of Christian Churches – those which were available at the time of this newsletter being published. Please visit the NCCA website, www.ncca.org.au.

Historic Paris climate agreement hailed by ecumenical leaders

The NCCA joins with faith leaders the world over in celebrating the historic climate agreement signed in Paris on 14 December 2015.

Faith Leaders take a stand against Modern Slavery

The Australian Freedom Network was launched at Parliament House in Canberra on December 2, 2015, the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery. At this event faith leaders signed the same 'Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery' that was signed at Vatican City in 2014.

The Australian Freedom Network will:

- Raise awareness about slavery in Australia amongst faith communities
- Unify faith-based organisations to collaborate on ending slavery in Australia
- Inspire people to engage with the issue of modern slavery as an extension of their faith in Australia
- Encourage faith communities to take meaningful actions to end slavery in Australia
- Support and amplify existing anti-slavery work in Australia

Individuals and organisations are invited to sign up and lend their support to this work. For more information, visit: <http://afn.org.au/>

Climate March saw great turnout right across Australia



These photos, from the Climate March in Brisbane (above and right), with the QCEN banner prominent. Clive Ayre says "Some folk moved to the March from St John's Anglican Cathedral after a short service, others from St Stephen's Cathedral, and as you can see there was also a strong UCA presence".



Jacqui Remond, Convenor of NCCA's Eco-Mission Project, says "Over a thousand Christians gathered at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney before joining the March at the Domain. United by our faith and our passion for climate justice and peace, it was something to behold - and something we will never forget!"

OUR ACTIVITIES

Act for Peace

Act for Peace is promoting the 17 Global Goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals which were approved on September 25th 2015 and committed to by 193 world leaders. These Global Goals will set the plan for reducing poverty and supporting development in all countries, for all people for the next 15 years. They follow the great progress made by the Millennium Development Goals – halving extreme poverty since 1990. For more visit: <http://www.actforpeace.org.au/Get-Involved/Campaign-for-change/Global-Goals>

Safe Church Program

The Safe Church Program continues to work on material and resources for Safe Church Training Agreement members. We have also met recently with the NSWEC Heads of Churches and the VCC Standing Committee to discuss the work of the Safe Church Program. Work has also begun in planning for the next Safe as Churches? Conference in May 2017, to be held in Melbourne. Other highlights of the work of the Safe Church Program include:

VPSN NCCA Child Safe Standards Seminar

On Tuesday 1st December the Victorian Professional Standards Network (VPSN) and the NCCA hosted a ***Child Safe Standards Seminar*** at the Centre for Theology and Ministry, Melbourne.

Bettina Cook, Principal Policy Officer for the Betrayal of Trust Implementation within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), presented new Victorian Legislation around Child Safe Standards which were passed in November this year. This legislation will be implemented in two phases commencing in January 2016.

The seminar gave an outline of how the DHHS Standards place within the SCTA National Standards, with Bettina recommending that these new standards be implemented within existing policies. Josh Woollett lead the participants through an afternoon of work-shopping the new DHHS standards which allowed for collaborative and fruitful discussions around practical ways for implementation. Many thanks to Josh, as well as Kylie Kendal and the rest of the VPSN for their roles in making this day very worthwhile.

If you would like more information from this seminar please don't hesitate to [contact us](#) and we will be happy to assist you with you inquiry.

World Council of Churches and UNICEF Engagement

On November 19 the World Council of Churches and UNICEF held a seminar ***“A Stronger voice for Children’s rights”*** in Geneva, in particular looking at principles for child-friendly churches.

National Coordinator of the Safe Church Program, Cameron Haig, participated via video conference, focusing on promoting child protection through church communities, ensuring that child safeguarding policies are in place in church communities.

He spoke about the work of the Safe Church Training Agreement, how it could assist churches around the world in working towards creating a safe place for children in church communities. Work was undertaken in regards to speaking of the necessity of policies to be in place, but for policies to be understood and implemented among churches.

Safe Church Program will continue to dialogue with the WCC in this important area of work and how we can support and provide input into this area among the global church.

Many thanks and Christmas blessings,

Safe Church Program

P: (02) 9299 2215, E: scta@ncca.org.au, W: www.safechurches.org.au

A Safe Church Tip

Does your church have a **code of conduct** for those in ministry roles?

A wonderful quote from the Church of Ireland's Safeguarding Trust highlights great benefits for having one "In our ministry with children (and young people) a tremendous amount of good work is undertaken by excellent dedicated adults. The purpose of a code of conduct is to affirm this, to support what is already good and to improve current practices to safeguard children from abuse"

If we adopt this approach when developing a code of conduct it will not be a daunting task.

EAPPI

Australian EAs currently serving in Palestine



Peter and Gillian wearing their EAPPI vests in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Two more Australians are currently onground in occupied Palestine, serving with the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) of which the NCCA is a part. They arrived on 2 December.

Gillian and Peter are both Sydney-based, with longstanding interests in human rights in the Middle East. Gillian is former teacher, who has taught English in both the West Bank and Gaza in the past, and in recent years has been busily undertaking her PhD on civic education in Palestine. Peter is a photographer and art teacher, who has travelled widely and undertook a brief study tour to the middle east early in 2015.

Upon arrival Gillian and Peter have had a very busy first week of orientation and training with much to learn and adjust to. As Peter says, *'It is incredibly surreal to be in East Jerusalem at the moment. Almost every day there seems to be violence here. We might hear sirens and see helicopters but the city carries on. The violence seems almost painfully routine and predictable.'*

Gillian adds, *'It is heart breaking to see the contrast of young primary school children skipping and running down the narrow cobbled streets of the Old City [of Jerusalem], the girls with their cute little pink back-packs and hair ribbons, while at the same time we saw groups of soldiers, carrying state of the art weapons, some wearing balaclavas and looking as if they had stepped out of a violent x-box game. No child should be dealing with that reality on the way to and from school.'*

Over the coming three months, Gillian and Peter will live and work in small teams made up of EAPPI volunteers from around the world, offering solidarity and protective presence to vulnerable communities, and also undertaking human rights monitoring. Peter will be based in Bethlehem, while Gillian will be living in a small rural town in the north of the West Bank called Yanoun.

The WCC recently stated its grave concern at developments in Israel and occupied Palestine, expressing solidarity with all those who seek peace in the region and calling on the international community to take decisive action for a sustainable peace in the region. They also invited the global Christian community to 'pray for the witness and ministry of the churches and Palestinian Christians who continue to work for peace between the communities, for an end to occupation, for realisation of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, and for justice and peace to reign between Palestinians and Israelis, and between Muslims, Jews and Christians.'

The EAPPI is an expression of the WCC's commitment to accompany those working for peace and justice in the region, and we are pleased that Gillian and Peter can participate in the program at this time. To follow updates on Gillian and Peter's work please follow EAPPI-Australia on Facebook. You can also email us for more information, visit the website, and support us by making a donation.

INTERFAITH

On 10 December the Catholic Church's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published a new document entitled "The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: a Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (No. 4)". To read the full text, visit:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html

EVENTS

December	25	Christmas Day	Western Christian
January 2016	7	Nativity of Christ	Orthodox Christian
	26	Australia Day	National

NCCA FORUM 24 – 27 June 2016

Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees 20 March 2016

Ecumenical Lenten Resource for 2016

Return to God: *divine grace and human struggle*, the Ecumenical Lenten Resource for 2016, is now available at SA Council of Churches website www.sacc.asn.au

The Resource is grounded in the **Gospels** that will be proclaimed in Western and Orthodox Churches each Sunday during Lent/the Great Lent. Each of the selected Gospels is followed by

Reflections from three different perspectives - Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. **Icons and images** are also included.

Ecumenical Lenten Resources have been offered every two years in South Australia for more than 40 years. They offer an opportunity for people from different churches to gather in small groups for prayer and reflection throughout Lent on the journey together towards Easter.

SA Council of Churches hopes that you will find **Return to God: *divine grace and human struggle*** helpful for your own Lenten journey. Additionally, we hope that many of you will contact neighbouring churches and invite people to form interdenominational groups. Notes to assist you in convening groups and in sharing leadership are also at www.sacc.asn.au

Please note that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday 10 February 2016/ the Great Lent 14 March 2016.

For more information, contact Geraldine Hawkes, Ecumenical Facilitator, South Australian Council of Churches – Ph: (08) 8215 0300 Email: sacc1@picknowl.com.au

One day in Melbourne Evangelicals online (conference)

For editors, writers, authors, bloggers, designers, social media

- ❖ providing latest in technique, quality and function -
- ❖ maximising the Gospel

Details

Venue:

Salvation Army Headquarters
95-99 Railway Rd, Blackburn

Date:

Saturday 16 April 2016
11.00am - 4.30pm

Cost:

Free entry

RSVP: Email to info@markt.id.au by Tuesday 12 April 2016 providing Name, State, Publication, Blog, Interest

Enquiries - 0419 917 713

The day is industrial, the philosophy is gospel.