

New President of National Council of Churches in Australia

New President Rev John Gilmore chaired his first Board meeting for the National Council of Churches in Australia on Ash Wednesday 2 March. His opening reflection on the Churches' season of Lent was based on Luke 9: 51-56, when Jesus "resolutely turned his face towards Jerusalem".

The forty days of Lent observed by the Western Churches from Ash Wednesday is a season of sixty days of prayer and fasting in the Orthodox and Oriental Churches commencing on Monday 7 March. The season of Lent leads into the celebration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, events that historically and biblically occurred in Jerusalem.

Rev Gilmore is a Minister of the Churches of Christ in Australia and is the 9th President of the NCCA. The Council was formed in 1994 to succeed the Australian Council of Churches (ACC) that was established in 1948.

Rev Gilmore's father, Neil, was a past President of the ACC who served from 1973-76 and John has said that the events he attended with his father during his Presidency were very influential to his ecumenical journey. With the NCCA, Rev Gilmore has served Australia's Churches in many roles, notably with refugee resettlement programs and Act for Peace overseas aid programs and now to the NCCA President's role.

Rev Gilmore will be meeting with National Church Leaders at an online meeting on 15 March and it is hoped that after the period of COVID pandemic and not being able to meet in person for two years, the occasion of the National Church Leaders' meeting in Sydney at the end of July will include the commissioning the NCCA leadership team of President Gilmore and General Secretary, Elizabeth Stone. Ms Stone commenced her current role during the COVID pandemic in May 2020.

In meeting with the Board and National Church Leaders, the President and General Secretary are providing more details of their involvement in the engagement of the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with Pacific Churches and communities through the Pacific Church Partnership Advisory Network. NCCA will be providing resource and logistical support for the meetings of the network and Pacific Church Leaders over the next two years.

The National Council of Churches comprises 18 member churches and four observer churches. This Lenten season of prayer and fasting is also focusing on praying for peace in Ukraine as well as the more 'forgotten' conflicts and human suffering in Ethiopia, Myanmar and Syria. All of Australia's Churches have significant congregations from these countries that are feeling heavy-hearted about what is happening in their homelands. Australia's Churches have also expressed their strong support to the Australian Government to settle 20,000 people from Afghanistan through the Christians United for Afghanistan campaign.

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