

Some news:

This week we have had the NCCA Heads of Churches and Executive meetings in Sydney.

These were important tasks for me in my role as Interim General Secretary of the NCCA.

We had prepared for them carefully over recent weeks and can report that they were prayerful, insightful and involved significant decisions.

A fuller report will be available in due course.

A particular highlight was the hospitality of His Grace, Bishop Irinej, Serbian Orthodox Bishop of Australia and New Zealand at the St Lazarus Church in Alexandria.

Along with a delightful lunch we also had a look at the splendid work on vestments done with much artistry and scholarship.



Bishop Irinej on the right



Thereafter, we listened and conversed around a very insightful paper by Fr Gerard Kelly on “Receptive Ecumenism”. His paper is attached and warrants careful study.

Both the Heads of Churches and the NCCA Executive members who later conversed about this could see the significance—what might we look like as Church if we further adopt the method of receptive ecumenism?

A key insight is that we move from just learning **about** another Church or community (which we have done much of, effectively) to learning **from** the other, in ways that help us be true to ourselves and our calling.

There are many, many projects which spill out from this change of perspective. We briefly discussed some—

- Models of leadership: how can we better train and equip Godly leaders?
- Finance and administration: by ‘opening our books’ and procedures to one another, what might we learn?

- On Governance. Given the increasing demands for compliance; the various elements of contemporary governance, what can we learn from each other, including as regards how we keep being faithful to our missional calling in Australian society?
- On social issues. Some Churches have had a longer internal debate about certain issues than others. What can those just beginning to consider matters of Sexual Identity, Marriage, etc, learn from others?

These glimpses convey ways we can thus, perhaps, help each other do what we do better. Not imitating each other, but learning from each other.

I personally find this model of Receptive Ecumenism and its practical applications very exciting. It seems to promise a method through which our Churches can deepen our unity. It seems to open ways by which the NCCA can add value to member Churches in facilitating some such projects.

Of course, all this lies ahead.

A new General Secretary is in the process of being appointed.

Matters of Vision and Governance are being further developed.

I am returning to my work as Regional Bishop in the Diocese of Melbourne, grateful for this opportunity to serve.

Archbishop Philip Freier at his first National Heads of Churches' meeting as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia.



Also attached is the splendid survey paper Bishop Irenej gave us on *“Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of Orthodox Churches in Oceania”*.

It has been a rich couple of days. Poignant, too, given the discussions we also had on the plight of Christians in the Middle East. Bishop Najarian of the Armenian Apostolic Church and Fr Shenouda spoke with great anguish as regards the ongoing suffering.

The Litany in Act for Peace: *“Praying for Peace in the Middle East”*, was used on several occasions. The Christmas Bowl liturgical materials were affirmed.

The Bishop Najarian asked us all to join in prayer and public witness on December 6th (St Nicholas of Myra). More details will follow about this Australia-wide time of prayer and action.

A recent response to my letter to our Prime Minister is also attached.

Conclusion

In my meditation I quoted a prophetic statement from the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC in 1968: *“The Church is bold in speaking of itself as a sign of the coming unity of humankind.”*

What a high calling is ours! Especially considering all the trauma and wounding in the human family. All the deep, historic matters which are unreconciled.

In this context, how important thus is our unity as Australian Christians, disciples of Jesus *“the One in whom all things hold together.”* (Colossians 1:17)

Grace and peace in Jesus

Bishop Philip



Liz Stone, Associate Interim General Secretary has done excellent work preparing our recent meetings. She continues her vital role, thanks be to God.

Fr Shenouda has a splendid pastoral heart. He takes more phone calls than the busiest bookie in Cup Week! All done with great warmth and prayerful attentiveness, God bless him!