

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

ANNUAL REVIEW 2017-2018





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National Council of Churches in Australia

National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) was formed in 1994 as an unincorporated association, succeeding the Australian Council of Churches established in 1948.

NCCA was incorporated in June 2016 as a company limited by guarantee with 19 member churches. As at 30 June 2018, NCCA had 18 member churches, of which 16 were financial members.

NCCA Prayer

God of life, unity and peace,
 you have called us to be your people.
 Bring us to closer unity with you
 within the household of your Church.
 Direct our steps as we journey
 In the National Council of Churches
 in Australia,
 that we may become what you have
 called us to be;
 and that together we may walk
 in newness of life:
 new and old, east and west,
 indigenous and all
 who have gathered in this land
 from the corners of the earth.
 We ask this in the name of Jesus
 and through the grace and communion
 of the Holy Spirit. Amen



BASIS

National Council of Churches in Australia gathers together in pilgrimage those Churches and Christian communities which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and commit themselves



- (i) to deepen their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church, and
- (ii) to work together toward the fulfilment of their mission of common witness, proclamation and service, to the glory of One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS

The NCCA General Secretary facilitates meetings of National Church Leaders. Currently they are occurring annually. The meeting in Melbourne in September 2017 was timed to coincide with the visit of the Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria to open the Diocese of Melbourne's new Coptic Centre.

The Chair of the National Church Leaders was Mr Stuart McMillan, National President of the Uniting Church in Australia who finished his term in June 2018. Meetings are for support, getting to know one another and topical discussion.

One outcome of a meeting of National Church Leaders was a meeting of finance, banking, superannuation, insurance and property services representatives from a range of churches in Melbourne on 30 October 2017 to explore areas for possible collaboration around church finance and corporate services.

FRANC: Financial Representatives of Australian National Churches

The Uniting Church (UCA Funds) hosted a FRANC meeting in March 2018 with four streams to explore collaboration: Insurance and Risk; Banking and Finance; Property (Development and Management); Corporate Services (IT, Legal, Procurement and Human Resources).



GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Bishop Philip Huggins, Assistant Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, was elected President of NCCA in June 2016 and serves as Chair of the NCCA Ltd Board of Directors.

The NCCA Ltd Board met six times in 2017-2018. As at 30 June 2018, Board Directors were: Bishop Philip Huggins, Chair; Bishop John Henderson, Lutheran Church of Australia; Ms Anne Hywood, Anglican Church of Australia; Reverend John Gilmore, Churches of Christ in Australia; Fr Nabil Kachab, Antiochian Orthodox Church; Mr Thomas Ling, Chinese Methodist Church; Mr Rob Floyd, Uniting Church in Australia and Mr Geoff Officer, Catholic Church.

During the year, two Directors resigned from the NCCA Ltd Board and were thanked for their voluntary service: Mr David Penny, Catholic Church and Mr Artin Jebejian, Armenian Apostolic Church.

Sister Elizabeth Delaney of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan Order of St Benedict completed her three year term of office as General Secretary on 4 January 2018. From 22 January 2018 Ms Elizabeth Stone was invited by the NCCA Ltd Board to serve as Interim General Secretary during a period of review of the activities of the Council and consultation with member churches in the lead up to the Triennial Forum in June 2019.

Ms Deirdre Ashe, Director of Business and Finance for NCCA - Act for Peace is Company Secretary.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Recently, a Rabbi asked me about the NCCA.

I briefly described the genesis, linking back to that post war period which birthed the WCC, the parallel national structures and state councils as well. My rabbi friend could understand the genesis internationally, given two World Wars had begun in apparently Christian Europe. He was aware of how Australia's colonial sectarian rivalries had spread into the 20th century and why we needed to address this through internal work on our unity, via structures like our NCCA.

Externally, he could see what had been achieved and why this was no longer the primary driver of our purpose. (Although, as we all know, unity is a continuing journey).

We talked about commonalities in our understanding of our contemporary religious role in Australia. For example: helping our religious organisations fully implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission; advocacy for the vulnerable, like refugees; focusing our religious response to climate-change and expanding our inter- religious dialogue.

Conversations like this remind one that the way ahead for our NCCA is reasonably clear. The tasks are serious, substantial and of national and global importance. With our new structure and constitution, we are better able to help our members address these tasks together. We are really just at a point of new beginning.

The 2019 NCCA Forum in Canberra will be a very important opportunity to review and plan our best response, in God's providence and presence. As disciples of Jesus, together we can renew the Church and make a beautiful contribution to the well-being of all.

I am profoundly grateful for the contributions of our NCCA Board members, our Interim General Secretary Liz Stone and our other fine NCCA staff. Looking back, we are all grateful for the earlier work of Board members and of staff, such as former General Secretary Sister Elizabeth Delaney.

I hope and pray, in the Word and Spirit of Jesus, we can be wonderful bearers of resurrection hope and faith together.

Bishop Philip Huggins
President, NCCA

MEMBER MEETINGS

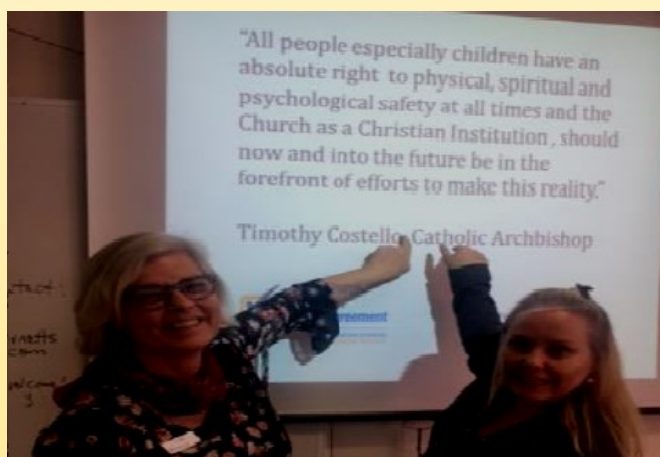
NCCA Assemblies are held three times a year to bring member church delegates and representatives together on topical issues.

In November 2017, the NCCA Assembly focused on 500 years since the Reformation with theological reflections from both Catholic and Lutheran perspectives, followed by a presentation on church planting in the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand. Dean Eaton presented on founding pioneering new congregations in the Church universal and providing mentoring for these congregations under five years old.

In 2018, there was a commitment to offer Assemblies based on the recommendations to religious institutions handed down in December 2017 in the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In March 2018, the NCCA Assembly held in Melbourne looked at the recommendations contained in Volume 16 of the Final Report and the Implementation Guidelines developed by the Royal Commission. The Assembly participants pinpointed aspects of supervision and people management of clergy and church workers recommended by the Royal Commission for more in-depth focus at 2018 Assemblies that provide theological and practical case studies for church representatives.

The July 2018 Assembly looked at Professional Supervision and the October 2018 Assembly is looking at Performance Appraisal Frameworks. Both were held at St James Parish Hall in Sydney CBD.



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT



Coptic Orthodox Church

In September 2017, the Coptic community welcomed their leader, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark, Egypt to Australia. It is with great friendship and love that the National Council of Churches welcomed Pope Tawadros to Sydney and Melbourne. Along with the wider Coptic community of Australia we prayed for a safe, rewarding and blessed visit to our country.

Antiochian Orthodox Church

The Enthronement of the Metropolitan Basilios Kodseie, Archbishop of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines took place in Sydney at St George Cathedral on Saturday 16 December. We prayed for Metropolitan Basilios and the Archdiocese as this holy event took place.



NATIONAL CONSULTATION OF SUDANESE AND SOUTH SUDANESE LEADERS

On Tuesday 15 and Wednesday 16 May 2018, a group of 26 Sudanese and South Sudanese church leaders from across Australia came together in a National Consultation at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra, under the auspices of the NCCA.

The church leaders in Canberra represented seven different denominations and six different Australian states and territories. They came together to talk of peace and unity and worked towards a statement of commitment.

The two day consultation culminated in the finalisation of a key statement which, assisted by DFAT and the Australian Ambassador, was delivered to the South Sudan peace talks in Addis Ababa the following day, Thursday 17 May. The statement from the Canberra gathering was read out by Intergovernmental Authority on Development special envoy for South Sudan, Ishmael Wais and was positively received by those attending the peace talks in Addis Ababa.



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Rev Janet Woodlock was employed as a part-time Project Officer in March 2018, for nine months, to connect with representatives of churches and other stakeholders to help inform strategic planning for the NCCA.

Through interviews NCCA member churches are being consulted in order to identify their key needs, hopes for NCCA, and ways each member might contribute further to NCCA. Key recommendations from the project will be considered by the NCCA Board in October 2018.

After listening recently to the exquisite music of J S Bach the question was raised: in this era of incessant noise and distraction, would he have been able to compose as he did?

The question itself points to our profound responsibility today to help people into the depths of Christian contemplative traditions, so they may find "the peace of God that passes all understanding".

That is, as we ourselves, in the grace of Jesus, seek to live with transfigured perception.

Bishop Philip Huggins

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

NCCA works through a number of Commissions, Networks, and Programs on areas of common interest and witness. The Commissions, Networks and Programs are led by a group of committed volunteers from member churches that work together as advisors.

The Agencies which comprise CAN are:



ACT FOR PEACE LTD

Act for Peace is the international aid agency of NCCA. Act for Peace Ltd (ABN 866 1997 0188) is incorporated as a wholly-owned subsidiary of NCCA which is the only member. Directors are appointed to the Board of Act for Peace.

The vision of Act for Peace is a peaceful world where all people share a safe, just and dignified life.

Our purpose is to empower passionate people to work together to strengthen the safety, justice and dignity for communities threatened by conflict and disaster.

CHURCH AGENCIES NETWORK

CAN has been formed by a group of 11 Church-based overseas aid and development agencies committed to empowering people and providing avenues for them to overcome injustice and poverty. The agencies work closely with their churches and local partners in many countries to achieve this change.

Act for Peace is a member of CAN and the humanitarian response/disaster operations sub-group known as CAN DO.

Each agency operates independently and unilaterally and as members of CAN, share a strategic faith-based vision of working and have a history of collaboration, sharing skills and resources and of working towards long-term development objectives and capacity building with our partner agencies in order to achieve the maximum benefit for the local community.

Act for Peace prepares an Annual Report that is submitted to Australian Government agencies, Australian Charities and Non-profit Commission (ACNC) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This meets industry standards required by the members' Code of Conduct of Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and DFAT Full Accreditation.

Act for Peace is a member agency of the Church Agencies Network and a member of the international ACT Alliance, coordinating in emergency response.

Today, there are more refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people worldwide than at any time since World War II. That's more than 65 million people forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and disaster. They are the world's most vulnerable people.

Act for Peace is supporting emergency response programs for refugees and displaced populations through partner church agencies in Jordan, Iraq and Bangladesh.

Act for Peace's long-term programs and policy focus is in community protection programs for communities affected by conflicts, disasters and displacement in Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Ethiopia; essential health services and education for conflict-affected women and girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the vulnerable in Gaza; community disaster risk reduction and response with churches in Vanuatu and Tonga; community conservation farming in Zimbabwe.



ACT FOR PEACE LTD

In the past year, Act for Peace has taken over the facilitation of the following ecumenical programs from NCCA.

AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES REFUGEE TASKFORCE

The ACRT has continued to work with other Church-based agencies and advocacy groups on a number of campaigns including the ongoing representation to the Australian Government and opposition parties to resettle the refugees and asylum seekers detained on Manus Island, PNG and on Nauru and close Australia's offshore detention centres. A particular focus has been to allow all children in offshore detention on Nauru to come to Australia.



ACRT is also part of the campaign *Dignity NOT Destitution* based on the principle that no person lawfully residing in Australia should be forced into destitution through the Government's removal of access to financial and housing supports. Churches and charities are already struggling to support destitute asylum seekers in the community, but extending this level of destitution to an estimated 12,000 people will be unprecedented and place a massive burden on churches and church agencies.

In December 2017 the ACRT has joined together with Save the Children, Refugee Council, Amnesty International and Welcome to Australia to recommend guiding principles for a new Community Support Program (CSP) which will enable members of the Australian community to sponsor visas for refugees from around the world who wish to begin the process of rebuilding their lives in Australia. The churches in Australia have a long history in supporting refugee resettlement in Australia and the refugee resettlement was a major program of the NCCA since the formation of a national ecumenical council of churches in Australia in 1948.



ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM IN PALESTINE/ISRAEL (EAPPI)

Bear Witness. Keep Watch. Build Peace.

Australians taking part in the World Council of Churches' EAPPI program spend three months being a protective presence for families living under occupation and negotiating border crossings to go to school, work, access health care to de-escalate tensions and prevent human rights abuses. The volunteers are witness to their suffering; keep watch with their communities; and work alongside an international Christian network standing in solidarity with people of all faiths, building the foundations for justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.



In the past year 320 Australians responded through Act for Peace's social media campaigns to express interest in training for a EAPPI volunteer role.

are transformed.

WHAT DO THE CHURCHES SAY ABOUT... PEACEMAKING?



JUSTICE NETWORK

The Social Justice Network completed its document, *What do the Churches say about Peacemaking?* in December 2017. The document is based on statements of member churches. It is intended for use by the general public as well as students in secondary schools. It is available to download from the NCCA website.

The Network commenced 2018 with a review of their mandate and the subsequent inclusion of the mandate of the Eco-justice Network to encompass Care of Creation with issues of justice and peace in a new Terms of Reference.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Justice Network gives expression to the NCCA's commitment to "encourage and enable the member churches, in the light of the gospel, to give prophetic leadership to each other and to the community" by

- speaking out against injustice, violence and oppression; and
- working to uphold the dignity of all people and the flourishing of all creation.

FAITH & UNITY COMMISSION

The Commission engages with the theological work of the wider Church, both to learn and to contribute. It does so with explicit awareness of and regard to its Australian context, in particular its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, multi-cultural experience, and the current setting of its churches in a post-Christendom, multi-faith and secular environment within the Asia-Pacific region.

Faith and Unity Commissioners representing member churches met once during the year, in May 2018, with the major focus of the meeting being the World Council of Churches' (WCC) document - *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.

500 YEARS since REFORMATION

This was marked by the Lutheran Church of Australia on 31 October 2017 with a commemoration in Adelaide attended by the General Secretary.

There was an historic document signed between Bishop John Henderson of the Lutheran Church of Australia and Archbishop Christopher Prowse of the Catholic Church in Australia to reflect the 50 years of dialogue and cooperation between the two Christian traditions to overcome the divisions of the past.



RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM

The 4th International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism was held 6-9 November 2017 in Canberra gathering State Ecumenical Officers, Australian Catholic University, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture and Charles Sturt University's Centre for Public and Contextual Theology.

Leaning into the Spirit

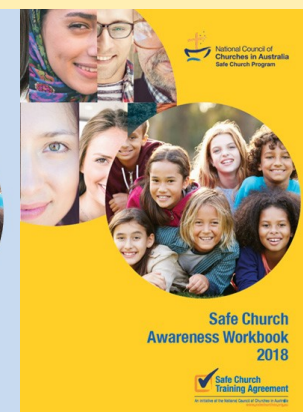
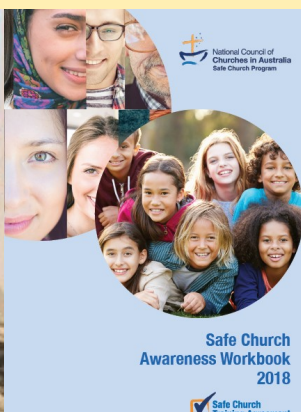
discernment, decision-making and reception

SAFE CHURCH PROGRAM

The National Coordinator of the NCCA's Safe Church Program, based in Melbourne, changed during the year with Mr Cameron Haig finishing in September 2017 and Ms Laura Cregan commencing in December 2017. The National Coordinator is well supported by an engaged Network Committee from a range of churches that meets every second month.

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was delivered in December 2017. The recommendations in the Final Report have required consultation and collaboration among churches. The Safe Church Network have provided support for the revisions and updating of the content and training materials of the Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA), policies and process documents so as to assist all churches in Australia to implement the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards.

Consultations have involved meeting with independent oversight bodies and regulatory agencies at State and Territory level and the new National Office for Child Safety established in July 2018 within the Department of Social Services. Roundtable meetings have been hosted by State Ecumenical Councils to bring together Heads of Churches with State and Territory authorities involved in child safeguarding.



FINAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION

The National Council of Churches in Australia [is] well positioned to work proactively with the independent oversight bodies to ensure that individual religious institutions are able to comply with the requirements.
(Volume 16, p 293)

The number of independent churches, Synods and Dioceses joining the SCTA is growing and the SCTA workbooks have been adapted for VIC, QLD, NSW and work is underway with WA. This means churches Synods and Dioceses in QLD and NSW are now using the SCTA training framework and materials for the first time.

With updated materials and training frameworks there has been a major focus on running *Train the Trainer* Courses for established and new presenters. In NSW there are 53 people who have undertaken the one-day training workshop and are in the process of working through co-presenting to become fully endorsed presenters by the end of 2018.

In VIC there are 25 people who have now been through the *Train the Trainer* workshop and 18 are endorsed. In QLD there are three presenters who have been through one day *Train the Trainer*, they are about to start their co-presenting.

There is also a desire to replicate the Victorian Professional Standards Network of church personnel involved in child and vulnerable person safeguarding in other States and Territories.



ECUMENICAL FUNDS

Glenburnie Program Fund

A property known as 'Glenburnie', Wooroloo, in Western Australia, was transferred to the Australian Council of Churches Association Ltd in 1976 as a gift from Laurie and Nancy Wilkinson. The property was sold in May 1987 and the proceeds were allocated "to provide resources for the churches and the community on issues relating to a just, participatory and sustainable society."



A Committee appointed by the NCCA administers the Glenburnie Program and the following activities received funding in 2017/18:

- Funding for the Youth Parliament of the World's Religions;
- Assistance to Act for Peace for managing the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel;
- Assistance to the Palestine & Israel Ecumenical Network to bring a Palestinian Christian to Australia in 2018 for the purpose of educating Australian churches and the wider public on human rights issues in Palestine and Israel.



Glenburnie Program
Towards a Just, Participatory
and Sustainable Society

Ronald Wilson Ecumenical Leadership Fund

The Ecumenical Leadership Fund assists young people eager to enlarge their ecumenical experience and leadership skills. It helps those who have exhibited leadership potential to develop their gifts and focus their vision. No applications were received to this fund during the year.

NATSIEC:

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission

The Commission has not been staffed since June 2015 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from NCCA churches have not been meeting as a Commission. Annual disbursements from the Development Fund are being overseen by the NCCA Board.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DEVELOPMENT FUND

NCCA's Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Development Fund (ATSIDF) is a tax deductible fund set up to assist Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples by giving small, usually one-off grants of up to \$5000, for community development projects.



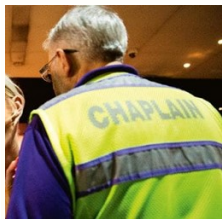
Two projects were funded in 2018: data projectors and screens for classrooms at Nungalinga College, a combined churches training college, located in Darwin NT; and to support the Surrender Conference in March 2018 funding was allocated for Indigenous leaders from around the country to travel to Melbourne.



Three projects were funded in late 2017: the Kurdiji 1.0 app for suicide prevention in the Lajamanu Community, NT, a project with the Black Dog Institute; media room carpeting at Nungalinga College, Darwin; Indigenous Leadership engagement at the Melbourne Surrender:17 Conference.



AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEER EMERGENCY CHAPLAINCY ALLIANCE (AVECA)



AVECA became a new network under the NCCA in 2018 with the purpose of formalizing the relations between state and territory disaster recovery chaplaincy networks. There is at least one annual meeting.

AVECA is a national body that will connect with governments, ecumenical councils and other groups to extend the work of disaster and emergency chaplaincy response in Australia.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNCILS



The General Secretary attended two Christian Conference of Asia meetings in 2017:



- Regional Consultation "Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia" in Thailand, July 2017.
- Asia Mission Conference "Journeying Together: Prophetic Witness to the Truth and Light in Asia" in Myanmar including celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Christian Conference of Asia, October 2017.

As an Observer, the Interim General Secretary attended the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches in Geneva in June 2018 including the celebration for the 70th anniversary of the Council and the visit to the Council of His Holiness Pope Francis.



AUSTRALIAN ECUMENICAL OFFICERS NETWORK

State Ecumenical Councils are present in all Australian States and the Northern Territory. Whilst the churches in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) meet, they do not have a Council. The Ecumenical Officers and General Secretary meet face-to-face once a year and this was hosted by the Victorian Council of Churches in Melbourne in March 2018.



INTERFAITH RELATIONS

NCCA participates in the **Australian National Dialogue for Christians, Muslims and Jews (ANDCMJ)**.

The 49th conversation was hosted by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) in August 2017 with sharing on 'Sin, Guilt, Shame and Forgiveness'.

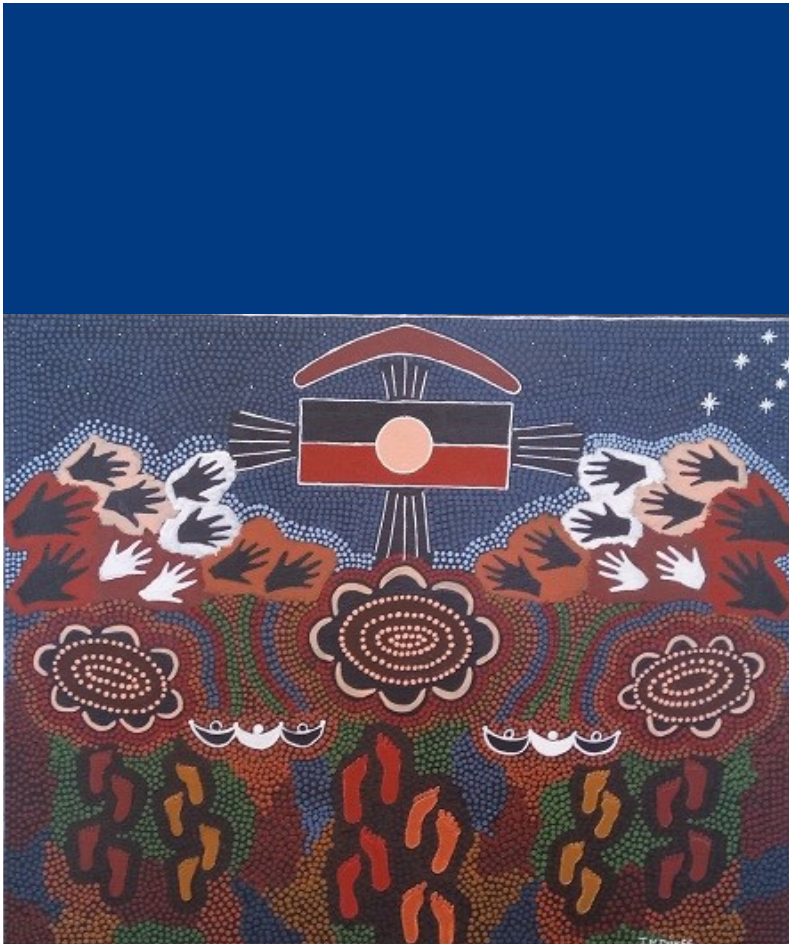
The 50th conversation was held at the Emmanuel Synagogue, Woollahra to coincide with the Festival of Hannukah for the sharing of the symbolism of light in each of the Abrahamic faiths.



NCCA is a member of the **Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO)** which was established to help build interfaith harmony and understanding in Australia. National-level multicultural and interfaith community organisations and academics are involved in APRO meetings.

The major activity of APRO in 2017 was a delegation to Australia's Parliament House in Canberra where meetings were held with the Foreign Minister, Shadow Attorney General, Senators and afterwards with representatives of the Australian Federal Police.





NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

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NCCA's audited financial statements for 2017—2018 are available on request : secretariat@ncca.org.au

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