

## **General Secretary office-bearers 2016-19**

Sr 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 (Liz) Stone was invited by the NCCA Limited 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 this Triennial Forum. Liz serves in the role part-time for three days per week.

Liz is a member of the Catholic Church and has previously served with NCCA as Associate General Secretary from September 2014 to June 2016 to assist with the transition to a new General Secretary and later to a new Director of Business and Finance. Liz served on the Act for Peace Commission since nomination at the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum in June 2010 and is currently a Board Director of Act for Peace, NCCA's aid and international agency.

## **Interim General Secretary's Report**

"Don't forget to let the Holy Spirit in" was the advice to me on taking up this interim role and it chimes with the words of Pope John XXIII (when he opened the Second Vatican Council) when he said it was time to "open the windows and let in the fresh air."

During the recent Easter season, our reading of John's gospel reminds us of the gift of the Holy Spirit for disciples of Jesus:

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." **John 14:26 NIV**

Taking the past 18 months as a period of review brings us to the 10<sup>th</sup> National Forum where reports and discussions are intended to renew the purpose of the Council and reflect on how we are a council of churches together in Australia; provide direction on the activities of the Council and issues of focus for the next three years.

Intentional Interim Ministry or Transitional Ministry may be familiar to you and is associated with a period of change.

"This change and transition may be things like: shifting demographics; decreasing membership, attendance, and finances; a need to restructure staff and/or lay leadership; a no longer vibrant mission/vision; or even the possibility of relocation, merger or closure..."

**This interim time is the ideal opportunity for a [faith community] to clearly answer the questions: "Who are we?" "Who is God calling us to be in the future?"** ([Center for Congregational Health](#), accessed 23 May 2019)

I would like to thank the NCCA President and Directors for their support, advice, assistance and friendship to me in this role. I could not have managed at all without the invaluable support of Mrs Noelene Osora as Executive Assistant who also carries the communications role with the NCCA Newsletter and NCCA's social media. Thank you.

## 2.1 Member Engagement Review

Reverend Janet Woodlock, formerly the Federal Coordinator of the Churches of Christ in Australia, was employed as a part-time Project Officer from March to December 2018 to undertake research of aspects of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) to inform strategic thinking. Working with the Board and I, Janet's approach was to:

- Consult with NCCA stakeholders, especially representatives of member churches in order to identify key needs, hopes for NCCA, ways each member might contribute further to NCCA.
- Interview representatives of selected non-member churches; identify key needs and barriers to NCCA membership.
- Interview selected other NCCA stakeholders, such as Chairs of the Commissions, senior staff, selected Board members, and State Council of Churches officers.
- Report findings to NCCA Board to assist in refining the NCCA strategic directions.

A draft report was made available to member churches at the end of October 2018 and member churches and members of the Commissions and Networks were invited to make further comment.

***The Membership Engagement Review Final Report, received by the NCCA Board in December 2018 is included as Document GEN 2.1***

## 2.2 Strategic Framework

Following receipt of the Review Report, the NCCA Board meeting on 29-30 January 2019 spent some time mapping current activities and meetings to a Strategic Framework, that rests on four domains that encompass the eight Objects of the Council (per the Constitution), as follow:

- ENCOURAGING – building ecumenical trust, ecumenical formation
- WITNESSING TOGETHER – prophetic voice, public voice
- CONNECTION AND FELLOWSHIP – promote relationships, joint activities
- ENABLING AND RESOURCING – governance, management and financing.

Following the mapping of current activities and initiatives, the Board's response to the recommendations from the Member Engagement Review were mapped into one Forum consultation document, refer to **GEN 2.2**.

The future of the Safe Church Program was a focus for the Board's review in 2018-19 and advice was received from Safe Church Network, the established state-based networks of Church Safeguarding Standards Officers and two external advisers at critical points. The three Assemblies of member church representatives also led to discussion about new areas for future ecumenical endeavour arising from the Royal Commission's recommendations on raising professional standards for ordained and lay ministers. Following the Forum's discussions on the strategic directions for the Safe Church Program, a Business Plan will be finalised.

Looking to how NCCA may facilitate the involvement of young adults in ecumenical activities and formation programs was a particular focus for a Project Officer, Emily Evans of the Uniting Church in Australia, who was appointed from August 2018 to July 2019 on a part-time basis, to fit around her travel and meeting commitments as a member of the World Council of Churches' Executive Committee and Gender Advisory Group.

Emily's reflections on opportunities to promote youth engagement in the ecumenical space are included in the recommendations of the Member Engagement Review report.

***The Forum Consultation Document – Strategic Planning 2019-22 is included as Document GEN 2.2***

## 2.3 How we work together

A third aspect of this review period was to look at how we work together as an ecumenical council and to try new ways to respond to emerging issues, topics and requests. NCCA has been unable to sustain 'Standing Committees' over three years (for a triennium) that is Church representatives meeting at least bi-monthly or twice yearly.

This unsustainable structure of NCCA's Standing Committees has especially been felt in not having a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (NATSIEC) meeting in the last three years. There are many people of goodwill with busy lives and ministry leaders holding multiple roles and commitments.

To explore other ways of working we asked our Faith and Unity Commission, Safe Church Network and Justice Network to give advice as to how we can be better responsive and relevant in our activities. This will form part of later reports to the Forum.

Some examples:

- We have used the four recent Assemblies in 2018-19 to bring church representatives together to discuss recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and specifically looking at theological foundations, good practice and case studies around professional supervision, selection and recruitment, performance appraisal.
- When only one church representative remained to meet as the Eco-mission Network, the mandate was brought into that of the Social Justice Network to become one Justice Network mandate for justice, peace and care of creation.
- A roundtable organised as a recommendation of a 2017 Assembly for those involved in Young Adult Formation in July 2018 resulted in an ongoing Facebook Group and the suggestion that a 'Community of Practice' be formed.
- Roundtable meetings were held on topics where a number of churches were developing education and advocacy programs and resources – Ecological and Climate Justice, June 2018 and Domestic and Family Violence, May 2019. This allowed for sharing and making connections for follow up and this might also continue as a 'Community of Practice' without a formalised meeting structure.
- Consultation meetings were held with ministry leaders across member churches and from across the country – Sudanese and South Sudanese Church Leaders in May 2018 and Sudanese and South Sudanese Women Church Leaders in March 2019.
- In our interfaith and multi-faith dialogues, there has been a renewal of purpose in meetings and new participants.

NCCA needs to have the flexibility to facilitate ad hoc meetings but also to ensure that all members and observer churches have the opportunity to attend and to propose topics for meetings as Roundtables or Consultations, out of which a task group might be formed with a timebound outcome to be the focus eg publication, resource or conference.

The General Secretariat believes that this can be managed by using the designated Member Delegate or Alternate for Assemblies as an 'Ecumenical Officer' who would be contacted when a NCCA meeting is being planned on a topic or issue so that the Member Church can seek the appropriate representative/s to attend and in turn contacts us on any matter.

## 2.4 Governance and Accountability

In the session on Sunday 23 June to reflect on the NCCA governance structure since incorporation in 2016, the Board and General Secretary have some recommendations for 'tweaking' the use of meetings for reporting and accountability for member churches.

Amending the Constitution to clarify the appointment bodies for the President and General Secretary is also proposed due to the changed function of Assembly meetings and who is attending Assemblies.

The use of Assembly meetings for a series of 'roundtable' discussions on the recommendations of the Royal Commission during 2018-19, highlighted a gap in having only the Annual General Meeting for reporting back to member churches on the 'business' and activities of the Council.

The Board is proposing that NCCA add to its Calendar of meetings a General Meeting in the first half of the year, maybe at a similar time to the National Church Leaders (formerly Heads of Churches) in late March.

Clause 43 of the NCCA Constitution details the requirements for convening General Meetings and Clauses 44 – 56 set out the conduct of a General Meeting.

## 2.5 Staffing and Resourcing

With the Interim General Secretary being available part-time, three days per week, other part-time staff have been employed as Project Officers for specific tasks. This has provided added vitality in Council activities and a sharing of a range of interests, gifts and skills.

It is unlikely that member church contributions will be sufficient to employ a full-time General Secretary and maintain all the current activities of the Council into the future.

The Consultation Document on strategic planning 2019-22 (**GEN 2.2**) indicates the agreement of the Board to the recommendation from the Member Engagement Review's final report that the Council needs to find new sources of financial support in addition to church contributions.

## 2.6 Structure of the Forum

The focus of the 10<sup>th</sup> Forum is on listening and discernment. We have engaged an external facilitator, Ms Allison Hornery, to work with us in the designated Dialogue sessions on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and the final Directions session on Monday.

Whilst the reporting sessions will present some recommendations, the listening sessions will be a mix of dialogue and more conventional workshop-style interaction. This will allow us to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and each other whilst also generating some outcomes for post-Forum action.

In addition to morning bible studies and the homily at the Ecumenical Worship, our guest, Bishop Geevarghese will reflect back to us through the Forum as we discern the Council's direction for the next three years.

We bring the promise of Pentecost to our renewed Council unity:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

**John 16:13 ESV**

## **Appendix 1 – Interim General Secretary’s Report (GEN 2.0)**

### **Requested Information on Actions arising from 2016 Forum Resolutions**

#### **Palestine and Israel**

A visit of Australian Church Leaders to Palestine-Israel proposed for 2017 did not go ahead and the NCCA Board meeting in January 2018 decided not to pursue the proposal as the availability of more than three National Church Leaders was not achievable given other commitments.

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network (PIEN) organized a speaking tour of 2-3 weeks throughout Australia in 2018 for a young Palestinian Christian and this was supported by a grant from NCCA’s Glenburnie Program Fund. Ecumenical Lenten studies on Palestine, with input from Palestinian church leaders, were prepared for use throughout churches in Australia in 2019.

#### **West Papua**

NCCA facilitated the visit of two West Papuan human rights defenders to Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne during 2018 as part of the #MakeWestPapuaSafe campaign. This campaign is directed to highlighting the use of Australia’s aid funding for the Australian Federal Police training of Indonesian security forces without evidence that these forces are involved in human rights abuses in West Papua.

We have also created a link between Peter Arndt of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and the WCC Commission on International Affairs in order that they can be provided with regular information on the situation for Papuans in West Papua.