

Justice, Peace and Care for Creation Report

(including the former Social Justice Network and Eco-Mission Network now one Justice Network)

The network followed its regular pattern of meeting bimonthly by teleconference.

Attendance at meetings has usually been confined to a small core group with some members not attending meetings. Not all NCCA member churches have formal structures/staff positions identified to engage with the mission of advocacy and education in social justice. However, these churches often engage in social justice work in their schools and communities.

Membership

The official list is as follows:

Religious Society of Friends: Wies Schuiringa
Uniting Church: Rob Floyd, Mark Zirnsak, Elenie Poulous and Jill Ruzbacky
Roman Catholic Church: Sr. Louise McKeogh FMA and John Ferguson
Anglican Church: Rev'd Peter Catt
Assyrian Church of the East: Caroline Sellanes
Salvation Army: Casey O'Brien Machado
Coptic Orthodox Church: Fr. Abanoub Attalla

Ex- offio

- Sr Elizabeth Delaney SGS (General Secretary)
- Elizabeth Stone (Interim General Secretary)
- Emily Evans (NCCA Project Officer)

The Commission was saddened to learn of the death of Jill Ruzbacky on 9 April 2018. Jill had been an active member and co-convenor of the Network for many years and her leadership and direction of the network is missed.

In early 2017 Rev Elenie Poulous resigned from the Network due to organisational restructure within the Uniting Church National Assembly office. The Uniting Church representatives on the Network are currently Rob Floyd and Mark Zirnsak.

The Justice Network elects its own Convenor. The role of the Convenor is to prepare and distribute the agenda, maintain contact with the committee members, act as the contact person with the NCCA General Secretary about the direction of the Justice Network and the administrative tasks for the preparations for the meetings.

Convenor: Jill Ruzbacky (to June 2017)

Following Jill, no one had taken over the role of convener of the Justice Network and this function has been managed by the NCCA secretariat.

The Mandate and the Work of the Commission

The Justice Network¹ 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 developing a deeper understanding of evangelism/ evangelisation in Australia's cultural context, addressing moral issues, speaking out against injustice, violence and oppression; acting in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and working to uphold the dignity of all people and the flourishing of all creation².

The Network's remit over the triennium had expanded to include the work originally undertaken by the EcoMission Project that wound up in late 2017. During this time, the way the NCCA implemented their priorities was further developed to include a number of Roundtables and Consultations. Therefore the previous Social Justice Network report, is now the Justice, Peace and Care for Creation Report.

Highlights

There have been some highlights from the Network over the last triennium.

Ecumenical Networking and Sharing

One of the strengths of the Justice Network is the ecumenical networking component of the meetings. At the beginning of each meeting a sharing around the churches happens. This is an opportunity of each church to highlight and update some of the key areas of priority and work that they are currently undertaking in that space. Through this process, there are connections made across the churches of common themes or areas of interest that different churches can collaborate or work together on.

On several occasions this process has led to members making resources available to the network, as well as sharing information about initiatives that are taking place beyond the membership of the network - such as Christian justice movement, Common Grace, active in the online space with young adults and Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) and their program of advocacy and non-violent action.

What do Churches Say about... Peace?

One of the difficulties for the NCCA as a council of churches speaking out against injustice in our society is that we are not always aware of how much we have in common and what may be the limits of what we can say together about any particular issue. It is also the case that there is no one place where church members, teachers, school students, researchers, academics and journalists can go to find what churches have said on matters of social justice.

Many NCCA member churches have formal position statements on matters of social justice and public policy. During 2017, members of the Network identified different statements that have been made on justice topics including refugees, poverty, human rights, indigenous issues and many more topics. These were in the form of official public statements, recommendations made by governance bodies and media releases. Each church develops and produces their statements in different formats. The library of statements is on a Drop Box.

The Justice Network then were able to resource the development of a resource for the member churches, 'What do the churches say about.... Peace?'

The resource is an easy to digest document that is framed on the World Council of Churches (WCC)'s 'Ecumenical Call to Just Peace':

- For Peace in the Community
- For Peace with the Earth
- For Peace in the Marketplace
- For Peace among the Peoples

¹ Appendix A - Justice Network Mandate

² NCCA Constitution 2016, 7.0 Objects and Purposes

Under each of the headings, an explanation of the theme and a number of key statements from the Melbourne churches were highlighted and practical suggestions were provided in ways churches, congregations and communities can address this area.

Round tables

The Network is made up of nominated members from across the member churches. It was highlighted that there is a greater breadth of experience and expertise within the churches in a number of areas. The NCCA is positioned well to facilitate the bringing together of these people in discussion. It is a way of promoting collaboration across the churches and the sharing of common areas of interest. Within this triennium two roundtables have been coordinated.

Eco Justice Roundtable – Friday 27 July, 2018

Talk about the winding up of the EcoMission Network and the renaming of the group...

The EcoMission Network exists to assist the NCCA in its commitment to encourage and enable member churches, in the light of the gospel, to give a prophetic leadership to each other and to the community in caring for God's creation. By the end of 2017 only the Convener, Captain Melanie-Anne Holland of the Salvation Army was attending meetings. This led to the Interim General Secretary winding up the group from 2018.

On 27 July 2018, the faithbased Eco Justice Roundtable was held and brought together 16 people that included members of the Justice Network, members of other faith based environmental groups including the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), Pacific Calling Partnership, Caritas Australia for Catholic Earthcare Australia and Common Grace. The roundtable participants shared the advocacy campaigns and work that each group is engaged with and then discussed future ways of potential collaboration. One of the outcomes of the Roundtable was the facilitation of connection across the NCCA member churches with others who are working in the same ecological and climate justice space. Ongoing networking between the participants has continued. There was discussion that this could become an annual meeting.

Domestic and Family Violence Roundtable – Thursday 2 May, 2019

On 2 May 2019, 25 people from across a number of Australian churches attended the NCCA Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Roundtable in Melbourne, held at the Barbara Dowling Room of St Paul's Cathedral, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

Participants were church people who work at developing resources, implementing training or drafting policy on domestic and family violence. Churches represented include: The Salvation Army, Anglican Church, Uniting Church, Religious Society of Friends, Lutheran Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Churches of Christ, the Ecumenical State Councils of NSW and Victoria, Hillsong and Scott Holmes, Manager Practice Development from Our Watch. A representative from the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne was a late apology.

A Theological introduction was presented by Rev Ian Rentsch, Coordinator, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence Campaign, Lutheran Church of Australia.

Participants made the most of the opportunity to network, sharing resources and learn from each other. The event drew people together who work in the space of policy development, training and advocacy within their church.

There was a great energy in the room, with confidence and enthusiasm to share ideas and work together. This proved to be a day where our differing church traditions could come together to listen to each other, to share and to proclaim Our Lord with one voice. Many participants developed new networks and expressed a desire to share resources.

The NCCAs commitment to promote the World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black (TiB) campaign - *Towards a world without rape and violence*, was also expanded upon during the days' sessions. Participants heard of the origins of the campaign, the reasons behind the colour selection and were even encouraged to wear black on the day.

Consultations

Sudanese and South Sudanese Church Leader Gatherings May 2018 and March 2019

The Sudanese and South Sudanese diaspora community in Australia has played a significant role in the peace process back in South Sudan. As a community, they are aware of the extent and intensity of trauma from the violence of war and the need for deep healing across several generations.

In May 2018 and March 2019 the NCCA coordinated two National Consultations with Sudanese and South Sudanese Leaders, with the second consultation focused on women.

In 2018, the NCCA drew together 27 Australian Sudanese and South Sudanese leaders from seven churches for a national consultation held 15-16 May in Canberra. Participants issued a "Unity Statement for Peace" at the end of the consultation, which was presented to the Addis Ababa peace talks and South Sudan Council of Churches on 17 May. The statement read: "We acknowledge the impact of war in giving rise to conflicting loyalties based on tribe, denomination and nationality within South Sudan and the South Sudanese diaspora in Australia." The statement resolved to build unity and model one people within the diaspora in Australia.

In March 2019, the consultation's aim was to develop connections and relationships across tribal and denominational loyalties across the country. The consultation was a unique opportunity for Sudanese and South Sudanese church women to meet together and share their stories, experiences, challenges and hopes for their contexts of living in Australia.

At the previous leaders' consultation (in May, 2018), there were only four women present out of 27, and one of the recommendations was 'that women need to be given their own space in the mediation process'.

The 20 women leaders from four churches and five States and ACT were aware of the extent and intensity of trauma from the violence of war and the need for deep healing in families and communities living in Australia.

The women identified the following topics as key areas of concern within their communities: 'Women as Peacemakers within their community', 'Intergenerational connection', 'Women's health' and 'Women in Leadership and Ministry'. Each topic was explored to identify the root cause and how each could be addressed and good connections were made for sharing programs and activities that are addressing the common concerns.

Lessons Learnt

During the triennium, the Network's focus and way of working has changed. It transitioned from producing ecumenical resources for Social Justice Sunday, a resource that was provided to the churches but little was known about how and where it was being implemented by the churches, to identifying certain themes that were relevant across the churches like eco justice and domestic and family violence. Also during the period, the 'What did the churches say about...Peace? was produced but the same concern was raised as to how widely it was picked up by the churches and therefore how relevant it was to them. As a result, resources have been redirected into coordinating issue-specific roundtable and consultation gatherings.

One of the limitations of the Justice Network is the reliance upon individuals to be able to attend bi-monthly meetings, produce material and be engaged with its dissemination and follow up. It requires commitment from the individual and member church to ensure that representatives are able to attend, be engaged and able to contribute to the ongoing work of the Network. A number of churches through the triennium have undergone major organisational restructures which has impacted on the availability of members. Without proper resourcing and support, the network is unable to fulfil its mandate.

The Network also identified the need for its ongoing work to be aligned closely with the strategic priorities of the Council; issues of focus that express our faith and unity and a closer link with the work of Faith and Unity Commission.

Work Plan for the new triennium

The Network seeks support from the Forum for the work plan for the new triennium:

- Coordination and implementation of annual thematic Roundtables identified by the Network.
- Involvement with the Faith and Unity Commission on developing a paper that explores the theology and practice of faith-based and ecumenical advocacy and the role of the NCCA in advocacy.
- Continued ecumenical sharing of issues, priorities and resources across the churches, through bi-monthly teleconference meetings.
- Encourage study of Holiness and Social Justice: Dialogue Report (2018). Commissioned by The Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia. (GEN 4.1)
- Maintain a watching brief on current and emerging issues into which the NCCA and its members might contribute
- Identify, where possible, areas of common work
- Together with State Councils encourage the study of [Roadmap for Congregations, Communities, and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice](#) edited by Rev Norman Tendis, (WCC Publications, March 2019) and garner interest for ecumenical interactions locally, state/territory and nationally. (Refer Document GEN 4.2)

Recommendations

1. That the Report of the Justice, Peace and Care for Creation Report be received.
2. That member churches continue to speak out against injustice, violence and oppression; and work to uphold the dignity of all people and the flourishing of all creation.
3. That member churches be encouraged to study the online NCCA document [What the churches say about... Peace?](#) and to promote it among their congregations.
4. That member churches take the opportunity to evaluate their own church's engagement with the Justice Network and available resources for study and engagement of congregations and groups, especially young adults.
5. That the Work Plan for the Commission be endorsed.