

# Faith and Unity Commission

# Mandate

To focus and reflect theologically

- on the faith that unites us
- on the Gospel imperative to work towards unity
- on the way in which our member (and other) churches can move towards greater visible unity in worship, common life and mission in Christ

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

- “... a tool to aid churches in both developing a deeper self-understanding of their own processes of moral discernment, offering a framework within which dialogue about moral disagreements can take place.”
- “... to identify principles and practices of moral discernment we hold in common as churches and to discover where we diverge. Our goals are to claim the common ground we share, to help us understand how and why we often come to different conclusions, and to search together for ways to prevent our principled differences from becoming church-dividing.”

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

## Starting affirmations

- a. Human persons are created in the image of God & called to relationship with God
- b. Each human person has a unique dignity & is called to live and find fulfilment in the human community
- c. Human persons are capable of goodness
- d. Human activity is often characterised by brokenness and sin
- e. Morality is the discernment of and acting for the good and the right

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

Ethics as a discipline and the method of this document

- *Descriptive ethics*: concerned with what human persons actually do in their moral reflection, judgement and activity
- *Prescriptive/Normative ethics*: concerned with what human persons should do in moral reflection, judgement and activity; prescribes what ought to be the case in developing moral norms

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

Methodology of this document

This study is a descriptive study “to help churches gain a deeper insight into causative factors of disagreement with the hope that a deeper understanding of difference and division can pave the way for improved ecumenical dialogue about moral issues”

The study uses a CASE STUDY methodology

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

## Sources of Moral Discernment

### A. Faith Sources

- a. Guidance of the Holy Spirit
- b. Scripture
- c. Tradition
- d. Teaching Authority
- e. Spirituality
- f. Church culture (customs, habits, identity)

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

## Sources of Moral Discernment

- B. Human reason and other sapiential sources for moral discernment
  - a. Reason
  - b. Natural law
  - c. Moral reasoning
  - d. Natural, social and human sciences
  - e. Conscience
  - f. Experience
  - g. Civil law and human rights
  - h. Culture and cultural artifacts (and language)



# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

## Faith and Unity responses

- Our churches have identified and named the various methods they use for moral discernment
- They have identified the internal challenges they encounter in trying to arrive at a moral position or statement for the life of that church
- They recognise this document as providing a good basis for ecumenical dialogue

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

“... we encourage each church to take up the task of engaging in this helpful document to gain self-understanding of their particular congregational process of ‘how’ they engage in the process of discernment concerning moral and ethical matters. This task of seeking self-awareness should be followed up by inter-church and intra-church dialogue ...”

(Churches of Christ)

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

“To the extent that this document sheds light on the significance of, and need for, a better understanding of moral discernment as practised within one’s own and others’ traditions – in hope of overcoming historical tensions – it is an important first step. Indeed, in light of the many and growing moral dilemmas facing humanity and the world at large, this WCC study document needs to be furthered as all churches will continue to face increasing challenges in this area ...”

(Greek Orthodox Church)

# *Moral Discernment in the Churches*

For your reflection and discussion

What sources of moral discernment does the NCCA use if it wishes to make a public statement on a moral issue?

# *Together Towards Life*

Questions setting the scene for this document

- How and where do we discern God's life-giving work that enables us to participate in God's mission today?
- From a renewed appreciation of the Spirit, how do we re-envision God's mission in a changing and diverse world today?
- How can we reclaim mission as a transformative spirituality which is life-affirming?

# *Together Towards Life*

- As threats to the future of our planet are evident, what are their implications for our participation in God's mission?
- What are the insights for mission and evangelism – theologies, agendas and practices – of the 'shift' of the centre of gravity of Christianity where the majority of Christians are living or have their origins in the global South and East?

# *Together Towards Life*

- There is a shift in the mission concept from 'mission *to* the margins' to 'mission *from* the margins'. What then is the distinctive contribution of the people from the margins?
- Why are the experiences and visions of those from the margins crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today?

# *Together Towards Life*

- What kind of missional action can the church take in the midst of economic and ecological injustice and crisis on a global scale?
- How can we proclaim God's love and justice to a generation living in an individualised, secularised, and materialised world?



# *Together Towards Life*

- What are the ecumenical convictions regarding common witnessing and practising life-giving mission in a world of many religions and cultures?
- How can the church renew herself to be missional and move forward together towards life in its fullness?

# *Together Towards Life*

## Faith and Unity responses

- Our member churches returned to their own church statements on mission and evangelism and noted points of harmony between *Together Towards Life* and local documents
- Considered what learning they could take from the document

# *Together Towards Life*

## Faith and Unity responses

- Affirmations were noted:
  - Mission begins in the heart of triune God; love that binds Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation
  - Mission can no longer be envisioned as geographical expansion; there is a reverse mission from the margins
  - Mission is in communion with others, rather than mission to/for others
  - The cosmic dimension of mission: care of creation

# *Together Towards Life*

For your reflection and discussion

Share a story of mission in your church and of  
ecumenical partnership in mission

# Other activities of the Commission

- Week of Prayer for Christian unity
- Theological Reflection after the Royal Commission
- Theological support to other areas of NCCA life, e.g. Safe Church program; statement on Peace and Peacemaking; Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
- Australian bilateral dialogues

# Work plan: implementing mandate

- Propose revision of mandate: Key Tasks; Towards Implementation
- Theological reflection after Royal Commission; connect with Safe Church Conference
- Watching brief on work of WCC Faith & Order
- Theological foundations for Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
- Liaison with state councils on developments with *Australian Churches Covenanting Together*
- Forum on bilateral dialogues
- Watch for current/emerging NCCA issues

# For discussion

- What sources of moral discernment does the NCCA use if it wishes to make a public statement on a moral issue?
- Share a story of mission in your church and of ecumenical partnership in mission
- What practical steps can your local churches take to invigorate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity?
- Do you have any response to the proposed work plan?

Recommendations at  
the end of the report