



24-27 June 2016
Mary MacKillop Place
80 William Street
North Sydney

Faith & Unity Commission

Report to 2016 National Forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia

1. Introduction

Since the 8th NCCA Forum 5-9th July, 2013 the NCCA Faith and Unity Commission has met six times: 18th-19th November 2013; 23-24 June 2014; 17-18 November 2014; 11-12 June 2015; 23-24 November, 2015, and 31 March-1 April, 2016.

All meetings were held at the Centre of Theology and Ministry, Parkville, Melbourne. The NCCA and Commission members are very grateful to the Uniting Church, and the CTM Executive and staff for extending generously to the Commission the opportunity to be their guests for their regular meetings.

2. Members of the Commission.

Anglican Church:	The Rev'd Dr Jane Lee Barker; The Rt Rev'd Dr Doug Stevens, The Rev'd Dr Cathy Thomson (Chair)
Churches of Christ:	Rev Dr Merryl Blair
Greek Orthodox Church:	Dr Philip Kariatlis
Lutheran Church:	The Rev'd Cecil Schmalkuche succeeded by The Rev'd Dr Michael Lockwood
Religious Society of Friends:	Mr Dale Hess succeeded by Ms Beverly Polzin,
Roman Catholic Church:	The Rev'd Dr Gerard Kelly; Dr Anne Hunt (now retired); Sr Janette Gray RSM
Salvation Army:	Major Paul Kinder
Uniting Church:	The Rev'd Dr Chris Mostert, The Rev'd Graham Perry, Ms Maureen Postma,
NCCA Ex-Officio:	The Rev'd Tara Curlewis (retired General Secretary) succeeded by Sr Elizabeth Delaney (current General Secretary)
Observer	
Aust Christian Churches:	Pastor Stephen Fogarty (resigned from Commission)
Minute secretaries:	The Rev'd Jasmine Dow succeeded by Mr Jacob Legarda, now vacant
Guests:	Right Rev Philip Huggins (Acting General Secretary NCCA); Rev Canon Richard Tutin (QLD Committee NCCA)

3. Work of the Commission

3.1. Mandate

The work of the Commission for the triennium began with a review of the Commission's mandate, updated by the Forum in line with suggestions made in the Commission's report to the Forum. For the updated mandate please click on the following link:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/a6kb8pug1kx4oa/2016.03.31_Mandate.docx?dl=0

It was agreed that the work of the Commission as articulated in the six key tasks in its mandate, should focus on the following three areas:

- theological reflection on the faith that unites the churches;
- the gospel imperative to work towards unity
- the encouragement of NCCA member churches to work towards greater visible unity in worship and common mission in Christ.

3.2. Insights for the Commission from the 8th NCCA Forum

Consideration was given as to how the Commission might better intersect with the State Ecumenical Councils. The Commission explored the possibility of each state group being invited to offer a brief report at regular intervals highlighting the current focus of their work. One member of the Commission undertook to oversee this task, and a number of State Councils' and Affiliates' reports have been received by the Commission.

3.3. Requests of the Commission from the 8th NCCA Forum

The Forum requested the Commission to provide assistance to the NCCA Executive to explore how mutual accountability can help member churches live together.

The Forum also requested the Commission to develop a report to assist the Executive converse meaningfully about The Church towards a Common Vision.

3.4. Programme of work for the 2013-6 Triennium

The following programme of work for the triennium was set:

- Providing responses to the following documents: *Living Word Living Tradition* (Australian Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue), *One Baptism Towards Mutual Recognition* (WCC Faith & Order paper no 210) and *The Church Towards a Common Vision* (WCC Faith & Order paper no 214). Individual members of the Commission undertook to collate the Commission's work on these documents and offer draft reports for the Commission to develop and present to the Executive
- "Workshopping" with the Executive in the areas of Receptive Ecumenism and Mutual Accountability.
- Exploring the following themes: a common date for Easter; bi-lateral dialogues and the areas they discuss; invitation to state councils to report regularly to the Commission.
- Maintaining a "watching brief" on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

3.5. Working Methodology

Having clarified its mandate at the November meeting 2013, the Commission turned its attention to its working methodology. It recognised that the length of time between meetings makes it difficult to have continuity and clarity. The new agreed method for meetings was therefore to divide the meeting into two key areas: Theology and "Business". The Theology section was to be the main focus with the Commission concentrating at each meeting on two particular ecumenical documents/issues, one of which would be brought to completion at the designated meeting. Guidelines were also developed for the preparation of reports. These were not to comprise simply summaries of what each church says about a document/issue, but were to focus on questions and critical issues raised by the considered material, to identify points of convergence and divergence around these critical issues, and evaluate how the documents might suggest a way forward. It was recognised that

different documents might suggest different approaches, as might an identification of the target audience e.g. WCC; Exec NCCA; State CCs; dialogue partners etc.

It was agreed that the minutes of Commission meetings should record the order of business of the meeting, any decisions taken, and any tasks allotted to members. The specialised nature of the theological conversation would not need to be reported, though judicious summaries could be included. It was also agreed that the minutes would be submitted to the Chair for checking as soon as possible after the meeting.

It was suggested that a Minutes Secretary, a Melbourne based person, perhaps a theological/research student, should be approached to take the minutes and that a \$500 per year honorarium should be offered to that person. This was followed up, and from 2014-5 The Rev'd Jasmine Dow worked as Minute secretary. In mid-2015 when Jasmine needed to retire from this role, Jacob Legarda took on this responsibility. The commission members express their thanks and appreciation to both of them.

3.6. Working Timetable 2014-16:

The following timetable was adopted for the work of the Commission during the triennium:

<p>June 2014 Main Focus: <i>Living Word Living Trad.</i> Finish: <i>One Baptism</i></p>	<p>June 2015 Main Focus: <i>Common date for Easter</i> Finish: <i>Common Vision</i></p>	<p>March 2016 Main Focus: Work on Report to NCCA Forum. July 2016 – NCCA Forum</p>
<p>November 2014 Main Focus: <i>Common Vision.</i> Finish: <i>Living Word Living Tradition.</i> Other: <i>Accountability</i></p>	<p>November 2015 Main Focus: Finish: <i>Common date for Easter Report for NCCA Forum (July 2016)</i></p>	

4. Completed Theological Responses to Ecumenical Texts

4.1. One Baptism towards Mutual Recognition (WCC Faith & Order paper no 210)

This text was published for the WCC 9th Assembly in Porto Allegre in February 2006.

Extract from the Faith & Unity response:

It (This) is a study paper and not a convergence text. It is a document which attempts to encourage another level of discussion about baptism and baptismal practice thirty years on from "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," the highly significant convergence document produced by the World Council of Churches

in 1982. As such, it invites the reader to place baptism firmly within the broader context of Christian initiation which as a whole consists of pre-baptism formation, water baptism, chrismation/confirmation, Eucharist, and post-baptismal formation.

The Commission's engagement with the text began by requesting all members to offer a response on behalf of their own churches to the questions in sections §§ 83 - 108. Responses were received from representatives of the following churches: Anglican, Catholic; Lutheran; Orthodox; Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); The Salvation Army and The Uniting Church in Australia.

In keeping with the *modus operandi* of the Commission, members then attempted to identify from the responses some of the ecclesiological convergences and divergences across the denominations. These were then discussed and refined by the Commission. When completed, the response document was forwarded to the WCC Faith and Order Commission. For the full response please click on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xn6svkhzvzaj2qq/Appendix%20%20Baptism.docx?dl=0>

4.2. The Church Towards a Common Vision (WCC Faith & Order paper no 214)

Extract from the Faith & Unity response:

All of our member churches recognise that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* attempts to transcend the particular ecclesiological self-understanding of any one church. Some have heard a challenge to consider their corporate identity in a new light and to take seriously the emphasis on the *Missio Dei*. Others described the challenge in terms of thinking about the church theologically and not simply sociologically. This may raise the question as to what extent some of their own cherished traditions could be re-examined in the light of the convergence achieved in the text.

This document is a convergence text which claims continuity with Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) the seminal ecumenical document published in 1982.

Commission members who contributed to the Faith and Unity response to the document were members of the Anglican Church; the Greek Orthodox Church; the Lutheran Church; the Roman Catholic Church; The Salvation Army; The Society of Friends; and The Uniting Church in Australia. The Commission therefore considered the text and responded to it not from the perspective of any one denomination.

The full report was sent by the Chair of the Faith and Unity Commission to the WCC Faith and Order Commission and distributed by the NCCA General Secretary to State Councils with a view to encouraging them to pass the report on to their state faith and unity/ faith and order committees.

The Commission members discussed the possibility of producing a study guide for this WCC document, but realised that a number of guides are already being produced within the ecumenical movement nation-wide: e.g. the Uniting Church has a study, and both the NSW Ecumenical Council and the Queensland Churches Together Faith and Order Committee are in the process of producing their own. It was agreed that information would be sourced on the range of studies available, and where possible

(and with appropriate permissions) the material (or links to it) would be uploaded to the NCCA website.

When completed, the response document was forwarded to the WCC Faith and Order Commission. For the full response please click on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/q2tfhu6qeo89u90/Appendix%20The%20Church%20Towards.docx?dl=0>

4.3. Living Word, Living Tradition (A document of the Australian Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue; 2011)

Extract from the response paper by the NCCA Faith & Unity Commission:

The Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches are to be commended for this document which articulates significant convergence in the theologically disputed area of the relative valuing of Scripture and tradition in the contexts of revelation and of ecclesial authority.

The report of the Commission summarised the dialogue paper, highlighting the convergences and divergences in Lutheran and Roman Catholic doctrine, the key learning for both churches engaged in the dialogue, and the responses from Faith and Unity members to the dialogue paper. It also highlighted key insights of the document particularly the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in mediating Scripture and Tradition to the Church.

The quality and accessibility of the document was commended, as was its wide application i.e. that the findings of the document could be useful to denominations other than Roman Catholic and Lutheran. In compiling its response, the Faith and Unity Commission received contributions from its members who belong to the following traditions: Anglican, Churches of Christ, Religious Society of Friends, Salvation Army, and Uniting.

The response ended with a set of three questions which attempted to help the churches identify the future significance of this document for its life. These are:

1. What can the Christian Churches learn from the significant work of convergence achieved in “Living Word, Living Tradition”? To what extent can those churches suspicious of the authoritative status of Tradition accept its interpretation in this document?
2. Are *some* denominational differences partly semantic? How can we explore these differences and encourage others to do so?
3. The difference between churches arose at a particular moment in history, and usually pointed to a real problem in church practice at that time. We are challenged to study that historical moment and understand what led to the differences, but also to consider to what extent churches in our own time have undergone reform so that the problems of an earlier era no longer apply.

For the full response please click on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/3yuyqwcvcqhaouou/Appendix%20Living%20Word%20Living%20Tradition.docx?dl=0>

The Chair undertook to send the Commission’s response to *Living Word, Living Tradition* to the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. The General Secretary

agreed to distribute it to the NCCA Executive and Heads of Churches, and to post it to the website and to other NCCA communication channels.

5. Assisting the Executive in the areas of Receptive Ecumenism, Mutual Accountability and Ecumenical Theological Affirmations.

Receptive Ecumenism and Mutual Accountability were two possible areas of engagement between the Commission and the Executive suggested at the Forum in 2013. One of the members of the Commission was able to offer a paper to the Heads of Churches on Receptive Ecumenism in 2014 which was found to be very helpful and which happened to be experienced by the Interim General Secretary and a few other members of the Executive. However, because there has been a change of General Secretary as well as an Interim General Secretary during this triennium, it has not been possible to determine how best assistance might be given. On exploring the issue of accountability (i.e. of each of our member churches with the others) the current General Secretary suggested this might be a discussion to be caught up into a wider consideration of accountability and good governance in which the Executive is currently engaged with renewed energy. The Executive requested of the Commission in November, 2015 that it comment on a number of theological affirmations derived from the Anglican/Uniting document Weaving a New Cloth which the Executive wished to explore as having a generalised ecumenical application ie beyond the bi-lateral dialogue from which it originated. A response was submitted to the Executive following the November, 2015 meeting.

6. Exploring the following themes: a common date for Easter; bi-lateral dialogues and the areas they discuss; invitation to state councils to report regularly to the Commission.

6.1. Common Date for Easter

The most significant exploration of the issue of a common date for Easter took place at the World Council of Churches/ Middle East Council of Churches consultation in Aleppo, Syria in March 1997. It was raised again at the 2013 NCCA forum which generated some renewed interest in it in Australia. The Commission produced a paper proposing that the reason that the Orthodox churches have a different date for Easter from the western church is historical and calendric and not theological. This might appear to make resolving the issue easy. However it was noted that Orthodox views vary considerably over the date of Easter, so if the Commission were to produce a statement on this it would need to be the result of a comprehensive consultation of a wide range of Orthodox voices. The Commission was also aware that even if this could take place in Australia, this issue is not one that could be resolved nationally, as the Orthodox churches are part of a diverse global movement.

To access the paper please click on the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/j3mg3ema5sfllu2/Appendix%205%20Common%20Date%20Easter.docx?dl=0>

After discussion, the Commission was unanimous that progressing this matter should in the meantime not form part of its agenda. Note could be taken however of statements made recently by Pope Francis in pursuing a common date, as well as the reconciling meeting held with Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Commission expects this issue may need to be engaged in the future.

6.2. Bi-lateral Dialogues

At each meeting of the Commission reports from both Australian and International dialogues are tabled.

- 6.2.1 Anglican/Lutheran (Australian): This dialogue is focusing on Mission i.e. exploring the meaning of the *Missio Dei*, and of the potential for mission contained in the approaches of receptive ecumenism.
- 6.2.2 Anglican/Roman Catholic (Australian: AUSTARC): This dialogue has compiled a publication on holiness in the Australian context. This was inspired by the canonisation of Mary MacKillop. It was created with the view that it could be used for parish discussion groups, adult faith formation etc. There is some discussion about the next topic being Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation: *Evangelii Gaudium*.
- 6.2.3 Anglican/Uniting (Australian): The dialogue has created a *Weaving a New Cloth*, a national framework for local ecumenism. The project was not as ambitious as previous projects, but received support and provided a practical framework for the local Church. The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia (June, 2014) indicated its approval (with acclamation) of the framework. The Standing Committee of the Uniting Church of Australia approved this in July 2014.
- 6.2.4 Lutheran/Roman Catholic (Australian): This dialogue is working on the Papacy: starting with Peter in the New Testament, then developing a history on stages in the Papacy. This follows the invitation of Pope John Paul II for the church to examine how the papacy may be exercised in a new situation. The issues given focus are: Priority of Christ, Infallibility and Authority and Jurisdiction.
- 6.2.5 Lutheran/Uniting Church (Australia): New members have been appointed recently. This dialogue is working on producing a commentary on the great prayer of Thanksgiving.
- 6.2.6 Roman Catholic/Uniting (Australian): New teams have been formed recently to continue this dialogue, whose main focus is on hoping for the renewal of conversations about the Church in the marketplace. It intends using a model of receptive ecumenism to approach its work.
- 6.2.7 Salvation Army/Uniting (Australian): The topics currently being discussed in this dialogue are holiness and justice.
- 6.2.8 Anglican/Methodist(International): The Anglican/Methodist Dialogue has produced a report "Into all the world: Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches". The report covers the area of full visible unity, the meaning of apostolicity, episcopate, etc.
- 6.2.9 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)/Roman Catholic Dialogue (International): usually meets once per year. The fifth phase of the dialogue started in 2014. The emphasis of this new phase is on the Eucharist. Its current topic is "Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist". Sessions of the Dialogue were held in Nashville and Rome in 2014, and a session in

Bethany, West Virginia, in 2015. A discovery of an earlier phase was that the weekly observance of the Eucharist was central to both churches. The meetings are very fruitful with creative teams of people. A number of convergences have been discovered through this Dialogue.

6.2.10 The Salvation Army/Roman Catholic (International): The 2007-2012 phase of the Dialogue culminated in 2014 at the Vatican in an audience of General André Cox with Pope Francis. The Salvation Army has published a book as a result of this Dialogue: *Conversations: A record of the papers presented and recommendations made during the informal conversations between The Catholic Church and The Salvation Army 2007- 2012.*

6.2.11 Issues: Responses to the Bi-lateral Dialogues are welcomed by the NCCA Forum. The Commission is considering the role that the NCCA and the Commission can play in facilitating the process of the publication of bi-lateral reports etc. as it was recognised that these Bi-lateral dialogues belong to the wider church. It was agreed that hardcopies of reports from Dialogues were needed for historical purposes, but the question about the best method for reporting and material production remains an important one for the Commission.

6.2.12 Bi-lateral Dialogues Index

The Faith and Unity Commission had in 2013 forwarded to the 8th NCCA Forum an index of Australian bi-lateral dialogues. This was well-received by the Forum and it was suggested that as an extension to this work a thematic/subject mapping of the conversations could be valuable. More work has been done on the Index during the current triennium, and it was agreed that it would be forwarded to the Executive for their information, and be presented to the 9th NCCA Forum in 2016 as part of the Faith and Unity Commission's report.

The Bilateral Dialogue Index PDFs can be found on the NCCA Website, and the Commission envisages that these indexes will be kept current.

Clarification was sought on whether the documents to be included are those that have been accepted by the Councils of the participating churches, or those that are simply a result of discussion. It was agreed that it is necessary to make clear that this is a list of all publications, formally accepted or unaccepted. It was also agreed that all further publications (with details of where these can be found) be forwarded to Gerard as they emerge.

A question was raised about publishing a third Stages on the Way. Discussion about publishing logistics followed. It was agreed that there is not enough material for Stages on the Way 3 as yet. It was also questioned whether hardcopy publication was the best method. In any case the new Bi-lateral Index will be helpful for anyone who decides to publish Stages on the Way in the future.

6.2.13 Bi-lateral Dialogues Forum

The Commission would like to foreshadow the possibility of organising a forum on Bi-lateral Dialogues during the next triennium.

6.2.14 Dar es Salaam Report (Tenth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues).

The Commission studied this document during 2015-6, and agreed that the following questions could be asked of Australian churches involved in dialogues:

- what criteria does your church apply in the selection of teams to be involved in dialogue? Does the team reflect the diversity of the church?
- the issue of reception of the results of bilateral dialogues remains a concern. Is it possible to plan for the reception of dialogue reports as discussions begin, and plan to develop Bible Studies and other resources so that church members are able to access issues being discussed?
- when the results of a dialogue are received by the participating churches, how do we ensure the agreements are incorporated into the work of the theological colleges and affect the structures of the participating churches?

6.3. State Councils

It had been suggested that the Commission attempt to communicate with state ecumenical councils and commissions, and that reports from these state groups be invited and included on the Commission's agenda. One of the Commission members took responsibility for this area of communication and encouragement, and some positive and cordial conversations between the Faith and Unity Commission and the State Councils of NSW, South Australia and Victoria have begun. The Commission will renew its efforts in the new triennium to encourage communication between itself and the state councils.

7. Maintaining a “watching brief” on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The Commission noted that in 2014 there had been a revitalised energy for the Week in various locations. QLD held a number of activities including a service. NSW held a service at which the new General Secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council was commissioned. The theme of the 2014 services was “Has Christ been divided?” The theme of the 2015 services was “Jesus said to her, “Give me to drink””. The theme for the 2016 Week is “Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord” which is being resourced by the church in Latvia.

The Commission is hoping to bring forward the release date of the Australian resources, as it was felt that the release date in previous years was rather too close to the Week. The Chair of the Commission followed this up with the Chair of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Working Group, The Rev'd Canon Richard Tutin General Secretary of Queensland Churches Together (QCT). It was agreed that an earlier date can be achieved i.e. it is hoped that materials can be finalised by the end of January each year.

Richard addressed the Faith and Unity meeting in 2014, and a timeline was agreed for the publication of the materials. It was recognised that the Week of Prayer needs to be on the agenda of the June Faith and Unity Commission in the year prior and that a reminder for promotion should be forwarded in October to the General Secretaries of State Councils and to the Heads of Churches responsible for promotion.

The Chair expressed the gratitude of the Commission to the QLD Committee and asked Richard to convey this to the group, whose membership evidences diversity in culture, denomination and geographical location.

8. Relationship of F & U with Australian Christian Churches

The Commission has welcomed the contribution over several years of Stephen Fogarty who was appointed as the Australian Christian Churches Observer. Stephen's presence and input helped the Commission to explore Pentecostal ecclesiology and the approach of Pentecostal churches to ecumenism. A helpful document called "Ecumenism from the Bottom Up" by Shane Clifton was studied by the Commission.

Following the news that Steven Fogarty would no longer be available to fulfil the role of observer it is understood that ACC church leaders would appoint a new participant. The Commission continues to express its desire to remain in dialogue with the Australian Christian Churches.

9. Suggested Future Work of the Commission.

The Commission by June, 2015 had fulfilled its undertaking to respond to three major ecumenical texts (as above). A discussion at the June, 2015 meeting suggested that the following texts might be worthy of exploration and response.

9.1 Moral Discernment in the Churches (WCC Faith and Order Paper No. 215)

It was suggested that this document would be a timely focus for the Commission in light of the currency of the investigations of the Royal Commission into institutional sexual abuse. (Work on this began in November, 2015)

9.2 *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism.

It was agreed by the Commission that work on this document would begin in the next triennium.

The current Commission is concerned to encourage reception within the churches of the fruits of various bi-lateral dialogues. This is suggested as an avenue of exploration for the Commission that is formed after the 2016 Forum.

*The Rev'd Dr Cathy Thomson,
Chair NCCA Faith & Unity Commission,
April, 2016.*