South Australian Council of Churches Inc. Report

Ecumenism today is not merely about ‘doing things together’. Ecumenism today includes especially the potential for renewal and reform both within as well as across our churches, leading into the greater flourishing in the Way of Christ.

Receptive Ecumenism offers pathways and processes for such renewal, reform and flourishing. It does this through the relationships that develop, the methodology it fosters, the disposition it requires and engenders, and the integration of the learnings and discoveries that flow.

Below are some examples of how SA Council of Churches has nurtured and nourished this possibility across the Member Churches during this year, building on the systematic introduction of and engagement with Receptive Ecumenism during the past ten years. Each aspect relates especially to SACC Priorities 1 & 3 Formation and Education for Leadership in Ecumenism in the Spirit of Christ and Receptive Ecumenism, while permeating the other Priorities:

Fourth International Receptive Ecumenism Conference (RE IV) November 2017 in Canberra

SACC initiated arrangements for Australia to host RE IV. Twenty-three South Australians participated (out of 140 world-wide), and several gave papers at plenaries or in workshops, and led sessions, indicating that RE is developing deeply and widely in SA. On return from RE IV, SACC hosted conversations with SA participants regarding possibilities in their respective arenas - formation for ministry, congregations, synods, inter church councils, theological colleges, schools, bi-lateral dialogues. Planning for the Fifth International RE Conference has begun, to be hosted by the churches in Sweden in June/July 2020.

SACC also arranged a Mini-Conference, with keynote speakers from RE IV; gave Presentations in range of places, including parishes (country and metro), Graduation Address at University of Divinity https://divinity.edu.au/blog/2017/11/30/2017-adelaide-graduation/, Anglican Centre of Rome Fundraising Dinner (Adelaide); continued to develop and share Resources; facilitated a range of Conversations; assisted and guided people with activities and possibilities.

Publication: Receptive Ecumenism – listening, learning and loving in the way of Christ

Vicky Balabanski, Flinders University, and I, as co-editors, have gathered thirteen articles from several authors in Australia and overseas and have submitted these to publisher, ATF Press, for peer review. The publication is intended as a resource for any who are interested in the method and possibilities of RE, and is expected to be available by the end of 2018.

Some other contributions during the year in nourishing and nurturing the understanding, growth and practice of ecumenism across the churches in SA include:
Ecumenical Partnership in the Mission of Christ (Priority 5)

Ecumenical Bequest to assist in the work of Refugees and Displaced Persons

In February 2017 SA Council of Churches (SACC) shared news of a bequest it had received to assist in the work of refugees and displaced persons. SACC is grateful to the donor, Yvonne Button, formerly of St Saviour’s Anglican Church, Glen Osmond, and a member of SACC Refugee and Displaced Persons Task Force for many years. Five quite diverse projects which received funding were recently completed. Story and details at www.sacc.asn.au

In what ways does your church act with other Christians on education, advocacy and fundraising to help alleviate poverty, oppression and injustice in Australia and overseas?

SACC invited the churches to respond to this question. Following consideration of responses, SACC wrote offering insights and suggesting resources to assist Member Churches in developing and deepening ecumenical partnerships as a way of being alongside our world, especially people whose lives are marked and diminished by poverty, oppression and injustice. See March 2018 letter to Member Churches at www.sacc.asn.au

Growing Together in Discipleship: Journeying Together in Mission formed the main focus for SACC General Council in May 2018, when the meeting was held on the train from Adelaide-Gawler-Adelaide. See Summary at www.sacc.asn.au

Conversations to advance Christian Unity and deepen the churches place in culture/society (Priority 2): Promoting relationships and stories in the local arena, and participating in and responding to communications and activities with Government, NGOs and the wider community.

Formation and Education for Leadership in Ecumenism in the Spirit of Christ (Priority 1)

Ecumenical Lenten Resource 2018: A Lenten Pilgrimage to the Heart: May we be always ready to give up what we cannot keep in order to gain what we cannot lose.

Leaders of Christian Churches SA (LoCCSA)

SACC has an advisory role with LoCCSA as well as offering Secretariat. A more clearly stated alignment between the desire of LoCCSA for shared conversation and action and SACC Priorities emerged early February 2018. This has led to various conversations and cooperative actions, especially with reference to the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Other activities include dialogue between Churches and Members of Parliament, and conversations on church planting and renewal in the local/neighborhood arena.

Relationships and Methodology

In all these examples, I wish to draw attention to the continued methodology inherent in each one of them, namely that of ongoing theological reflection and the value and importance of team: every project and activity occurs within a collegial and collaborative framework.
For your further information:

- SACC Priorities
- SACC issues a weekly E-news and regular communications with Church Media.
- The Diocese of The Murray – cessation of SACC Membership.
- Substantial reduction in SACC budgeted deficit achieved due to reduced staff hours.

**Challenge for the journey ahead**: It seems more than ever that our unity (in diversity) matters. There are many challenges facing the Church in Australia, as there are facing people generally today: daily life is complex, and our world remains divided and dualistic in so many ways. The contribution of the Church, as disciples in mission together, with the disposition, virtues and behaviour that our shared journey needs and engenders, appears to be a gift the Church has to offer, in, with and for our world.

**Geraldine Hawkes**
Ecumenical Facilitator-Executive Officer
October 2018