
Ecumenical Affairs

Convenor
Ex Officio
Members

Rev Ruth Vertigan
Rev David de Kock
Dorothy Carey
Rev Frances Hadfield
Rev Pearl McGill (to be elected)
Ian Passmore
Karen Sloan
Rev Marie Wilson

1. AIMS

- To promote dialogue with other Christian denominations
- To encourage dialogue with other faiths
- To maintain links with the Council of Christians and Jews
- To make available resources for local discussion regarding co-operation
- To share news of ecumenical activities around the State
- To be a liaison with the National Church's dialogues with other denominations
- To communicate worldwide trends in ecumenism and to be a link to activities within the World Council of Churches as well as the National Council of Churches in Australia and the Council of Churches of WA

Ecumenism is at the heart of the Uniting Church. We are encouraged to ask how we are engaging with others in all our activities and to intentionally plan for this. This committee can be a gatherer of stories which may inspire others.

2. ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH AWARD

We were greatly encouraged by the quality of entries received for the inaugural annual award in 2015. The Award is designed to recognise and celebrate ecumenical and interfaith initiatives of our congregations, schools and agencies. The Pinjarra Community Kitchen won the \$500 award in 2015 for their ecumenical and community project which provides meals,

hygiene packs and shower facilities for people in need. Another entry describes how the local UCA initiated an inter-church network to share information, resources and to facilitate shared community projects; and a third entry describes a regular inter-denominational film event for the community.

3. COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WA

The Uniting Church is an integral, active member of the CCWA with longstanding commitment to field three members to the executive and up to ten for general membership. Currently the Ecumenical Ministry Officer of CCWA happens to be Uniting Church Rev Frances Hadfield. She produces a regular newsletter of open events, invitations and activities hosted by a great variety of churches which can be accessed at: www.churcheswa.com.au. Inspired by the City of Dublin, a particular initiative of the CCWA

this year has been the Pilgrimage for Unity which coincided with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and preceded the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation. Pilgrims were invited to have a passport stamped at about a dozen city churches of different denominations, to participate in some planned events during the week – worship, or talk and tour – and to reflect on the experience. The several Orthodox church visits proved especially popular.



4. CHRISTIAN UNITY WORKING GROUP NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Each year we send at least one delegate to this national UCA conference which supports ongoing dialogue with Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox, Salvation Army and Roman Catholic churches at an international level. The conference also gives a chance for States to hear from each other and to review UCA relationships with many ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Global Christian Forum, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Methodist Council.

Terence Corkin, in addressing the 2015 conference as outgoing Assembly General Secretary, said ecumenism is a strategic decision and principle, a discipline, an expression of our character as Uniting and a witness to hope. The UCA also has something of a vocation in assisting churches that want to explore alternative ways of decision making.

He pondered that in many areas we find it easy to operate with other denominations and so some members in the pews think there are no differences worth worrying about; however there are differences and this needs to be acknowledged. Receptive ecumenism might contribute to a healthy owning of difference and engaging with those differences rather than supposing they do not matter. He commented that one area of dialogue we can consider is with the familial churches that have come to Australia since 1977 – like the United Methodist Church in WA. Australian society requires of the churches a witness as to how to live with profound differences around a lot of important matters. This is not an easy thing but it is a particular vocation for Uniting and United churches and we have something to bring to the table.

5. COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN WA

The council of Christians and Jews aims to promote understanding between people from the Jewish and Christian communities in WA. This involves education and developing personal relationships. Events are normally organised five times a year. This year they were as follows:

- Monday 9 November was the Kristallnacht Commemoration "Night of Broken Glass" held at Christ Church Grammar Chapel. The speaker was Dr Ron Hoenig from the Australian Council of Christians and Jews who related the issue of refugees in Australia to problems of religious discrimination in the past.
- Sunday 31 January - 2015 Annual General Meeting where the guest speaker was Leon Schneider who was born and grew up in Perth. Upon finishing school, he went on a Habonim Dror Shnat program to Israel, which kindled his yearning for Zionist education and Jewish culture. He gave a fascinating overview of the various groups within contemporary Israeli society
- Sunday 3 April - Film: Woman in Gold based on the true story of the late Maria Altmann, an elderly Jewish refugee living in Cheviot Hills, Los Angeles, who, together with her young lawyer, Randy Schoenberg, fought the government of Austria for almost a decade to reclaim Gustav Klimt's iconic painting of her aunt. The film was screened in the Berlinale Special Galas section of the 65th Berlin International Film Festival.
- Thursday 12 May - Evening Worship with the Winthrop Singers, St George's College Chapel followed by a meal at the college and a fireside discussion for students at the college with Rev Dr Bill Loader.
- Tuesday 23 August - A Film: The Suffering of the Innocents - a symphony by the Orchestra and Choir of the Neocatechumenal Way, composed by Kiko Argüello was held at the Temple David Function Centre.



6. LOOKING AHEAD

We know there are many ongoing instances where the Uniting Church engages in ecumenical activities - for instance in Drug Arm, Finucare, Hope Community Services, and Chaplaincy in hospitals, schools and prisons. Godly Play training and the Fresh Expressions ministry are also ecumenical in nature; and we have a robust and life-giving involvement in the Social Justice Round Table. There are certainly other examples we'd love to hear about. It is through spending 'wasting' time with each other as well as in acting together that

relationships grow, which are there to be called upon when needed.

One striking example was the #I'llridewithyou interfaith service at Perth Wesley which gathered many people at very short notice to support Muslims at the time of the Lindt Café siege. The annual Palm Sunday March for refugees and the Love Makes a Way movement are further examples of ecumenical and/or interfaith joint action.

7. ACT FOR PEACE

It is expected that the service to launch the Christmas Bowl this year will be hosted by Willetton Uniting Church. In 2015 the service led by Rev Margaret Tyrer at St Aidan's was graced

by the One Accord Community Choir. The UCA continues to generously support this ecumenical appeal.

8. RELATIONS WITH OTHER FAITHS

Interfaith September is an opportunity to build understanding and friendship with people of other faiths. Our WA Synod has made a commitment to Sustainable September so we encourage people to use this resource at some other time – perhaps even October. It would be good to take some action with others in the community and tell the committee what has happened so we can spread the good news.

Michael Barnes from the Assembly Relations with Other Faiths Working Group writes:

“As Christians, we believe diversity is a part of God's creation. Our faith in Christ calls us to live together in peace and love and to engage in genuine dialogue with people of other faiths. In Australia today, there is much work to do healing divisions caused by ignorance and fear. But by reaching out to people of other faiths, we can make a difference.”

On behalf of the Assembly Relations with Other Faiths Working Group, I extend a personal invitation to your congregation to take part in Interfaith September this year.

You can participate in any way that suits you.

You may follow the worship resource each week, theme a sermon, use a suggested hymn or host an event. You may choose another time of year that is more suitable. It is up to you.

This year we have produced four resources:

- **Lectionary Guide:** A week-by-week reflection on the gospels contained in the Lectionary for September with four different interfaith themes.
- **Worship Resource:** Alongside the Lectionary Guide, the worship resource includes sermon starters, links to other resources, an Order of Service and other ideas.
- **Videos:** Six videos sharing stories of interfaith friendship. These are matched with the four weekly themes of the Lectionary Guide and could be shared during worship or community gatherings.
- **Interfaith Action:** Ideas and tips for how you can reach out to people of other faiths and build on understanding and friendship.



They can be downloaded now at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/interfaithseptember2016/> to help you and your congregation prepare for September.

Please get in touch and tell us how you plan to participate on email rof@nat.uca.org.au.

I encourage you to reach out to our neighbours of other faiths. The friendships we make can transform and enrich us.”

How is your congregation/school/agency/board engaging with other denominations or faiths? Do share! And do consider nominating for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Award.

Ruth Vertigan
Convenor
ruth.vertigan@wa.uca.org.au

