

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT 2021

2021 saw VCC continue to operate under the pandemic restrictions that meant that for the majority of the year the office facilities weren't able to be fully utilized with the Executive Officer spending significant amounts of the year operating from home, utilizing a number of online platforms. VCC also continued to operate without a dedicated Administration person. As Executive Officer the task of ensuring both the Ecumenical endeavours and networking whilst maintaining the necessary administration roles particularly in the situation of the lockdowns proved difficult and at times frustrating.

The VCC, like so many other organisations, continued to need to be flexible during the uncertainties of 2021 as it continued to offer ministry, in ways that largely didn't involve gathering people in person to reflect, discuss or pray but rather virtually.

Hence 2021 saw the maintenance of two of the roles VCC adopted in 2020.

- i. The need to maintain our online presence. Standing Committee met on line monthly, The AGM was held online in July and the Commissions all worked online. Our online presence enabled VCC to maintain relationships with both Government Agencies and departments as well as the other Faith Communities and community sector organisations within Victoria.
- ii. The VCC continued to be a sounding board and resource for those member churches from CaLD communities or those with less infrastructure:
 - i. though enabling churches to discover how to deliver liturgies or pastoral care online...
Many of these new adaptations are still in practise as we re-enter life after lockdown.
 - ii. being a place of information regarding the changing restriction requirements. This role particularly important to non-Western members of Council who often found the language in roadmaps or pronouncements confusing or so generic as to need interpretation.

2021 saw the completion of Fr Shenouda's time as President. A time encompassed largely by the pandemic and Governments responses to it. The Standing Committee wishes to express its gratitude to Fr Shenouda for his leadership over his term. In July at the AGM, the VCC presidency passed to the Anglican Synod of Melbourne, who provided Dr Graeme L Blackman OA as their person. Graeme has led the Council as we have emerged and then gone back into restrictions and as 2022 unfolds without restrictions, his leadership is greatly appreciated. Graeme has led the process of securing a new Executive Officer for the Council, with a successful candidate being appointed in March 2022. The new Executive Officer is the Rev Sandy Boyce who comes to VCC with extensive experience in both Ecumenism and local church life.

As Executive Officer, am particularly grateful of the way both Fr Shenouda and Graeme Blackman ensured we were able to be in contact weekly through a variety of ways to ensure that communication and direction was maintained and I was enabled fulfil the task required.

2021 drew to a close with both an uncertainty as to what 2022 would entail but also excitement as VCC enters this new phase of ministry under the leadership of new Executive Officer the Rev Randy Boyce and the Standing Committee as they bring the strategic plan in life focusing on the three priorities of Community, engagement and witness.

Year in Review:

Council believes that in conjunction with its Commissions the VCC remains a critical resource for the Churches across Victoria as they seek to live out their calling to be disciples of the Risen Christ.

i. Peak Body

Council has throughout 2021 sought through our engagement with Government, Government Departments, peak bodies within the Community Sector and other peak faith bodies to bring a Christian voice to the public sphere. This was particularly so in the latter half of the year as we sought to, through Victorian Church Leaders Network raise concerns that arose from two contentious pieces of legislation that were put before State Parliament. Whilst our engagement and imput didn't change the legislation or allay concerns nevertheless the Christian voice and presence was present in the public discourse surrounding these laws.

Council continues to have a presence on 'Multi Faith Advisory Group' to Government where the Christian narrative and perspectives on topics of Social Policy and community inclusion, the Prevention of Violence against Women and the development of child friendly places of worship are heard.

Council also is working with other Faith communities to ensure that we have a whole of community understanding.

ii. Sacred Space

2021 saw some consolidation in the relationships between member churches. The Victorian Christian Leaders Network continues to meet, welcoming a number of new Church Leaders into the network. The circumstances of 2021 has continued to the church leaders to seek to work closer together on a number of matters that have whole of church context or consequence. Whilst it's true to say that formal, structured Ecumenism is not a high priority, collaboration on matters of mutual importance is occurring. This is particularly so in the area of Church and State relations.

Here are some signs of hope:

- The Church Leaders' gatherings throughout 2021 where some 16 senior church leaders gathered and committed to exploring ways of supporting each other and working together.
- The 'Holding the Light' Ecumenical Service of Lament held during the International 16 days of 'Say no to violence' continues to offer an opportunity for Christians to gather, lament and commit afresh to working towards zero domestic violence. St Peter's Anglican Church in East Melbourne again hosted the gathering which was able to be a hybrid with some gathering in person whilst others joined via online means. This service continues to grow and broaden with different member churches participating.
- During 2021 VCC continued to engage with a number our wider ecumenical partners, VCC Emergencies Ministry and our national partners, NCCA and Act for Peace.
- During 2021 the VCC maintained its involvement with Interger (a new iteration of VCCE, Victorian Council of Christian Education) – through the presence of the VCC Executive Officer being a member of the Board of Interger. VCC also publicises the resources available and training opportunities to the member churches through the e newsletter.
- A renewed awareness of VCC as the VCC continued to be a resource hub for many churches as they maintained church online. The sharing of resources by many churches via their online platforms was a gift to the wider churches.

iii. Catalyst

This strategy builds on the premise that there are great resources and potential amongst the Member Churches. Through our networks and contacts, Council tries to bring ministries and people together.

The VCC through its Executive Officer continues to be a strategic and key participant in the movement across Victoria to implement programs and change of attitudes and behaviours within Faith Communities concerning Domestic Violence. As a member of the Multifaith Advisory Group's Reference Group, VCC is a participant in a Participatory Action Project to develop resources and model community change within Faith organisations.

Through our partnership with Commission for Children and Young People, the VCC continues to be at the forefront of creating safe environments for our young people. The online training portal continues to attract people seeking to be educated in the application of the 7 Child Safe Standards, Reportable Conduct and Mandatory Reporting.

During 2022, there is both need and potential to enhance this ministry as Victoria adopts the national standards for Child Safety. This will require a updating and refreshment of the website. Currently the Website is used by the major teaching institutes in Victoria as they prepare their students for child oriented work.

iv. Advocate

This strategy prioritises the Council being a voice for the voiceless or an organisation that stands with the marginalised. The strategy adopted is that we work in partnership with other organisations within each sector.

In particular, over 2021 the focus was on:

Refugees continue to be a focus as our Federal Government continues to maintain an inhumane policy towards those seeking refuge within Australia. As a member of Refugee Action Network (RAN) – in particular planning and leading the Palm Sunday March. During later period of 2021 and into 2022 there has been a new endeavour called 'Set them Free' which has a focus on those trapped in Hotel detention around Australia – I'm happy to report that at end of March 90 % of those in Hotel detention had been released into the community.

v. Good Governance

In parallel with the ministry strategies, Council continues to apply due diligence to its governance structures to ensure that Council is a good steward of that which we have inherited from the ecumenical family who have gone before.

During the year 2021, the VCC received two substantial bequests. The largess of these gifts when added to our reserves ensures that the VCC is financially secure into the medium future.

To ensure good financial management the VCC has engaged with U Ethical where our reserves are spread across a monetary trust, Australian Equities and International equities.

Through changes made to financial and Executive Officer reports, and continuous updating of our Risk Register, Standing Committee is seeking to meet all the requirements of ACNC and CAV reporting.

We have continued to seek better communication with our members, both Churches and individuals through a number of formats:

- i. Facebook: www.facebook.com/viccouncilchurches/
- ii. Website: www.vcc.org.au
- iii. Monthly newsletter: to subscribe email vcc@vcc.org.au

In conclusion

This is my last report. It seemed right to both myself and the Standing Committee that 2021 would see the completion of my time in leadership with the VCC. These past 8 years as Executive officer have been a humbling and rewarding time as I have had the privilege to meet, share and worship with our great family of our God in all our colours, shapes, traditions and understandings.

My time with VCC in general encompasses some 30 years, initially as a delegate and Commission member, then as a member of the Executive of Council, now called the Standing Committee. I have served as both a Vice President and as President. During these last 8 years, I have learnt much as I have worked alongside you all and am deeply grateful for the richness of the gift of the breadth and depth I have come to know, appreciate and celebrate as the Body of Christ, the visible expression of the Kingdom here on earth. It's my prayer that in some tangible ways I have been able to enrich this journey and experience for others.

It would be remiss of me not to note my deep appreciation of the leadership of all the presidents I have worked with, Mrs Joan Pye, Monsignor Peter Kenny, Pastor Gordon Wegener, Archdeacon Philip Newman, Major Kerryn Roberts, Rev Jason Kioa, Mr Frank Stuart, Mr Ashok Jacob, Bishop Peter Danaher, Fr Shenouda Boutros and most recently Dr Graeme Blackman. Their wisdom, grace, humour and tenacity have enabled VCC and myself to undertake ministry through these past years. Apologies to anyone I have overlooked.

I too note the privilege of working with the General Secretaries of my time; Rev Doug Dargaville, Rev Robert Gribben, Rev Hamish Christie-Johnson, Ms Maureen Postma, Mr Theo Mackaay. Each brought their unique contributions and insights and encouraged me in my ecumenical journey.

Finally, let me say a big thank you to our Standing Committee members; they have given of themselves in many ways to ensure the ongoing ability of the VCC to continue to enable the church's life and witness within the State of Victoria

To all associated with VCC, thank you. To work with so many wonderful Christians seeking a clearer expression of the unified body of our Lord, leads me to constantly giving thanks for the graciousness, creativity and generosity of God's people.

- Rev Ian Smith, Acting Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Churches



Ian Smith
Acting Executive Officer