

VCC Faith and Order Commission Report 2022

The VCC Faith and Order Commission continues to meet regularly. Our meetings during COVID times have been mostly via Zoom. In 2021, we met on five occasions.

Our most significant event since our last report has been the workshop in July of 2021 which was part of our work on the NCCA document, 'Australian Churches Covenanting Together'. This was a mixed media event, with a small face-to-face gathering at the Catholic Theological College, with other participants gathering via Zoom.

The Workshop was called "Covenanting Together in a Covid World" and sought to provide participants with an opportunity for listening, learning and sharing and exploring new ways of covenanting together as churches, of being the Body of Christ in new ways. The keynote speaker was Dr Antonia Pizzey who gave a profound lecture about "Deepening the Spiritual in the Ecumenical". She explored Spiritual Ecumenism by looking at the inward work we need to do to address in our own institutions, attending to our own wounds, the soul of the ecumenical movement and ecumenical activity that focuses on internal conversion. Inspired by John 17:21 "that they may all be one just as you Father are in me and I in you", Dr Pizzey unpacked Ecumenism as a spiritual task, as the search for a renewed spiritual ecumenism grounded in the primary relationship between Christ and us.

The Workshop also included speakers Rev Ray Williamson who provided an historic context to ecumenism in Australia, and Liz Stone General Secretary NCCA who reflected on the future of ecumenism and viewed ecumenism as a movement not a destination framed by Koinonia – communion – union with God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

From our previous report:

We are close to finalizing our collation of responses of VCC member churches to the Victorian Assisted Dying legislation. We found a diversity of approaches to the pastoral challenges posed by this legislation. We think that there would be value in publishing a version of what we have received from churches on our web site, partly as a reference for chaplains and other church members with a pastoral engagement in this area and partly as a basis for further theological and socio-political reflection.

The other focus of our work has been to share information about how our churches have been coping with the current restrictions on gathered worship and meetings in general. We have noted that there is widespread use of 'live-streaming', of online resources for home worship and the use of Zoom for meetings of many kinds. We have noted the various approaches to eucharistic worship, from live-streaming a eucharistic celebration, to a Zoom event with the possibility of more interaction between the participants (perhaps with people at home providing their own elements), with some churches choosing to 'fast' for the time being. We have begun a conversation about what theological questions we should be asking about virtual worship.

The membership of the Commission continues to be reviewed and we are currently seeking new representation from the Greek Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox churches.