

## **Report of the VCC Commission on Living Faiths and Dialogue**

Normally the Report would have been presented by Dr Ian Fry, as Chair of the Commission. As he has stepped down, Rev Ian Smith, as VCC Acting Executive Officer, requested me to step in.

I am unaware of who the members of this Commission were earlier, but during my time of attendance Dr Ian Fry (UCA), Fr Edmund Chia (Catholic), Ms Leigh Fisher (UCA), Fr Ruwan Palapathwala (Anglican), myself (Catholic) and Rev Ian Smith, ex officio, formed the Commission.

I also report that I was recently invited, as were the other two Commissions, to meet with the VCC Standing Committee (ST) and share reflections on

- \* how the relationship between the Commission and the ST can be strengthened;
- \* the helpfulness of the mandates (or not)
- \* how the ST and LFDC can collaborate in the three areas identified by the Strategic Plan.

LFDC discussions have recognised that connecting with a pluralistic, multifaith community is a vital function of the VCC in striving to be relevant to that community. The LFDC offers a significant pathway to interact with such a society continually shaped within a zeitgeist reflecting *inter alia* (among other things) the place of faiths and diversity. A Commission so guided can be regarded as fulfilling a prophetic role for the VCC.

The LFDC, however, has been hamstrung in its ability to function optimally. The pandemic has obviously been a major disruptor that has seriously impacted some of the planned activities.

There are structural difficulties, too, that debilitate the Commission. The membership is an area that needs to be looked at with concern. An unstable membership is not conducive to doing systematic work.

Regarding the Commission's relationship with the ST, there appeared to have been none or very little, which means there was minimal sharing of communication and mutual inspiration.

During the final meetings of the Commission some time was given to exploring a version of a Multifaith Centre. There were preliminary conversations with a well-regarded Multifaith Centre in the UK regarding possible ways forward. These can be resumed anytime.

The following are suggested as ways to enhance the functioning of the LFDC:

1. Members to be sought by the VCC, in consultation with the Commission and Member Churches, but not left to the Commission Chair or members entirely to do this.
2. While the Strategic Report well delineates the need for relationship building with Churches through meetings and other avenues, it overlooks the need for engagement in the public square. An awareness of such an emphasis would assist the LFDC greatly in its interaction with an evolving, contemporary environment. A Multifaith Centre of some description would assist this, given the prospect of eventual public focus initiatives. In turn, this would help improve the visibility of the VCC itself.
3. We need to be creative in attracting and engaging youth on our issues and concerns.
4. An active Commission would help link with groups such as the Columbans, and others.
5. The positive relations that exist with community interfaith and related groups via the Commission's own work or through ecumenical linkages should be strengthened.

The leadership shown by Dr Ian Fry as Chair, and Rev Ian Smith, the outgoing Executive Officer, is gratefully acknowledged, as is the contribution by LFDC members.

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you.

**Caesar D'Mello, LFDC.** *2 May 2022*