



Queensland
Churches Together

The First Twenty Years

Formation to 2011

Text by Ray Williamson





Queensland Churches Together

“Serving and witnessing together for Christian Unity”

The text of this booklet has been written by

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of the

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It forms a chapter of his forthcoming book about the history of ecumenism in Australia, and we thank Ray for allowing us to reproduce this chapter here to help recognise the 20th anniversary of QCT.

This booklet was prepared by Rev Anne Hulbert, Rev Stephen Nuske and Ms Margaret Naylor, with the assistance of the QCT Executive and QCT staff.

Photographs supplied by members of QCT.

Introduction

The story of Queensland Churches Together (QCT) is one of constant dialogue built upon the mutual respect and friendship of the member churches. These relationships have been forged over many years and predate QCT's formation in 1991. In many ways QCT is a product of the ongoing ecumenical conversation and activities in which churches have been engaged over most of Queensland's history.

While the following pages by the Reverend Dr Ray Williamson reflect the beginnings and growth of QCT over the past twenty years it is worth remembering that they record only a small but important part of the growth of ecumenism in that time. The contribution and enthusiasm of local communities and congregations have been the catalyst for QCT's formation and existence. Without that grassroots effort the vision of those charged with bringing QCT to life would have been severely hampered.

QCT's 20th anniversary gives us a time to reflect and take stock of the journey so far. It also arms us for the challenge of the years ahead as we continue the dialogue and encourage each other in our common witness, proclamation and service.

We thank Ray for allowing us to use this material from his forthcoming book on the history of ecumenism in Australia. His support and friendship over the years have been important and invaluable.

Richard Tutin
General Secretary
Qld Churches Together
December 2011

Formation and Membership

In the late 1980s, Queensland had had two councils of churches for over twenty years: an ecumenical contradiction! Up until 1978, the ecumenical body in Queensland had been the State Committee of the ACC, but in that year it became an autonomous state council, the Queensland Ecumenical Council (QEC), with six member churches (Anglican, Greek and Serbian Orthodox, Religious Society of Friends, Salvation Army and Uniting) and a number of Observers. For some years, there had also been another body, the Queensland Council of Churches, which mainly consisted of some Protestant churches for whom ecumenism was either unimportant or irrelevant, although its membership did include two QEC churches, the Salvation Army and Uniting Church.

However, by the late 1980s, there was a desire for change and ecumenical renewal. An important factor in creating that new environment was the close friendship between four church leaders in Brisbane at the time: the Anglican Archbishop, John Grindrod, the Lutheran President, Paul Renner, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Francis Rush, and the Uniting Church Moderator, Rollie Busch. In 1988, the Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism had suggested to the bishops of Queensland that they should explore ways to establish a single ecumenical body in Queensland that would be more representative of the churches than the two existing councils.

It was into this expectant situation that Bob O'Sullivan came as the new QECC Executive Secretary at the beginning of 1989, and at his Induction – not held until 3rd May - Bishop George Browning gave the Charge. In it he said: "...what I would like to charge you with as you commence this work is the possibility that you will need

to disband the QECC in order that a new Council or Conference might be formed. It is a sadness to many, if not most of us, that we have two Councils in Queensland and that the QECC itself comprises only a small number of churches¹. It is my great desire and I think of most other people that at the very least our union should include full membership of the Roman Catholic Church in particular and also the Lutheran Church and if possible other denominations as well. I consider this to be of the utmost importance and urge you to work very hard to ensure that this might become a reality for us in the very near future”.

Clearly Bob took that charge seriously. Just one month later, at a meeting on 7th June, he reported on his visits to various Heads of Churches to discuss the future shape of ecumenical structures in Queensland, and in the light of that report the QECC immediately resolved: “that this Council invite the Churches to establish a Steering Committee to facilitate a consultation between the Churches on the possibility of creating a new ecumenical body for the State of Queensland; that each Church be invited to appoint a representative to this Steering Committee; that the QCC be invited to appoint a representative to this Steering Committee; and that the QECC be represented on this Steering Committee by its President”.

Seven churches responded to this invitation by appointing representatives to a Working Group:

¹ The original membership of six in 1978 had effectively been reduced to four: the Salvation Army had withdrawn and the Serbian Orthodox no longer actively participated. However, while not being a full member of the QEC, the Roman Catholic Church was a member of the three QEC Commissions, and thus a very active participant in the Council for several years.

Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches, the Religious Society of Friends, and the Salvation Army. The QECC was represented by the President, with the Executive Secretary in attendance; and QECC provided secretarial assistance in the person of Gillian Froggatt.

Charged with the responsibility of formulating a constitution for the new ecumenical body in Queensland, this Group began its work in October 1989, and did so confidently because of the new ecumenical spirit that was clearly being discerned. When Archbishop Grindrod addressed the QECC in November 1989, he specifically mentioned the special service held in the Anglican Cathedral at the suggestion of Archbishop Rush to mark the second anniversary of the meeting between the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury as an example of the signs of movement in Australia towards reconciliation between the churches.

By April 1991, the Working Group was ready to present to the churches a draft document for a body that would be known as the Conference of Churches in Queensland. The QECC decided that the next step should be to invite the participating churches to send representatives to a two-day consultation to discuss the document. This consultation was held in May 1991, though a third day was required, the following month, for matters to be finalised. The long process of drafting the constitution was marked by a deep desire to 'get it right'. Of the seven churches represented on the Working Group, six were participants in the consultation: the Salvation Army did not send a representative.

Broadly speaking, the draft document was endorsed by the consultation, but one issue, finally decided by a vote, was the name by which the new body was to be known.

A significant majority determined that it would be called “Queensland Churches Together”.

Thus, with a proposed constitution finalised, the consultation participants recommended to their respective churches that they accept it and become founding members of this new ecumenical body. To consult with the churches and to guide the process to completion, an Interim Executive was appointed comprising two delegates from the churches present at the consultation, with Elizabeth Harrington (Roman Catholic) as the President and Bob O’Sullivan the Interim General Secretary.

The culmination was celebrated on 1st December 1991 when QCT was inaugurated, with six member churches, at a worship service held in the chapel of St Peter’s Lutheran College. The service was built around the theme of light and water, Archbishop Rush preached the homily, and the leaders of the member churches washed each other’s feet in an act symbolising service to each other.



Queensland Churches Together

Inaugural Service of Worship and Celebration



**St Peter's Lutheran College Chapel
Indooroopilly**

**3.00 p.m.
Sunday 1 December 1991**

The Anglican Church
The Lutheran Church
The Churches of Orthodoxy
The Religious Society of Friends
The Roman Catholic Church
The Uniting Church in Australia





Elizabeth Harrington

The first General Meeting of QCT was held on 8 February 1992, chaired by Elizabeth Harrington. She opened the meeting by welcoming delegates and visitors on “this historic occasion”, which she felt marked both a beginning and an end. She also spoke of “the many years of dreaming and initial conversations which were followed by more intentional work” that led to the formation of QCT.

The new General Secretary - Elect, Helen Mills (UCA), was present, and the meeting ratified her appointment and then proceeded to elect Bishop Jim Cuskelly (RCA) as the first President.

Over the years, the number of member churches has doubled from six to twelve. The Salvation Army, which participated as an Observer when QCT was formed, became a member in 2004, and the other additional members are: Queensland Congregational Fellowship (1993), Antiochian Orthodox Church (1994), Armenian Apostolic Church (1994), Romanian Orthodox Church (1996), and Coptic Orthodox Church (2007).

However, hopes for an even broader participation have not been fulfilled. In 1999 there were conversations with the Assemblies of God and there was some expectation of contact with the Baptist church regarding closer relations with QCT, but no involvement was forthcoming. Also, the Churches of Christ, which became an Observer when QCT was formed, has ceased to participate in the life of QCT. Other churches that had been members of the Queensland Council of Churches did not associate with QCT, and that Council was dissolved when the UCA decided it would belong only to QCT.

Purpose

The question of 'purpose' of a council of churches can often require patient clarification and negotiation. During the consultation in May and June 1991, this question was the subject of considerable discussion. Concern was expressed by several delegates as to the aims and parameters of the new body, centring on the perceived necessity for it to: (i) be truly representative of its member churches; (ii) have a sound theological base – probably a purely practical one at this stage, but to be worked on once the new body is in existence; (iii) have a prophetic voice, whilst accepting that it would be an instrument of the churches and that, as such, this might not be possible in a direct way, but could evolve from the interaction between the different denominations; and (iv) respect the independent vision of its member churches – to try to combine these might end up as divisive.

The purpose of QCT was expressed in terms of its Basis and Aims:

BASIS

QCT gathers together those churches in Queensland which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and commit themselves to:

deepening their relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his Church; and

working together towards the fulfilment of their mission of common witness, proclamation and service to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AIM

The aim of QCT is to encourage and enable Members to:

- a. pray together and share their faith, and to find ways to worship together, while respecting each church's disciplines, doctrines and traditions;
- b. foster Christian unity through dialogue;
- c. give prophetic leadership to each other and the community by:
 - i. speaking out on behalf of oppressed people;
 - ii. promoting reconciliation and healing between indigenous and non-indigenous people; and
 - iii. responding to human need and acting on issues of justice, peace and creation;
- d. foster a joint Christian mission in the wider community; and
- e. dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies in order to further mutual understanding and strive jointly for peace.

Fulfilling the Purpose

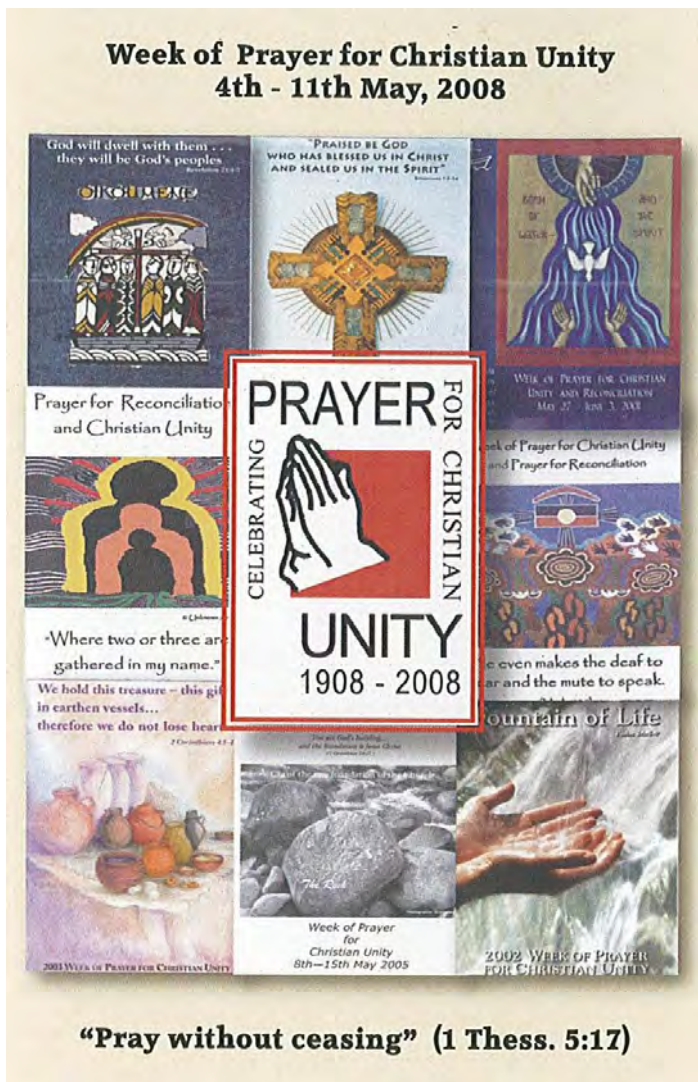
Throughout the two decades since its inauguration, QCT has implemented a wide range of programmes in order to pursue the fulfilment of its aims.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

When Christians pray and worship together their unity in Christ is being lived and experienced, and ecumenical relationships are strengthened.

This was recognised in the first aim of QCT, and it has been fulfilled in many different ways. There have been the special occasions, facilitated by QCT, when the churches have come together for worship.

There has been the promotion of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, specifically to encourage churches in local communities throughout the state to pray and worship together.



There has been **the facilitation of the Taizé Pilgrimage of Trust, led by a Brother from the Taizé Community**, on many occasions, offering opportunities for meditative prayer, quiet days and retreats.



Brothers Matthew and Ghislain leading Taize Worship at Toowoomba

Sometimes national initiatives can provide the opportunity for state ecumenical bodies to offer their members further opportunities to strengthen this foundational dimension of their relationship. This was particularly so in the years 2000 – 2001, the year of the Great Jubilee and the dawn of the new millennium. QCT was keen to see that time observed productively and fruitfully, and was quick to establish a special task force in 1997 to prepare for that national programme and plan ways by which the churches in Queensland could link into it and be part of it.

Grounded in prayer, ecumenical relationships can be fostered in ways that encourage and enable church communities and their members to co-operate and enter into commitments for engaging in mission together, especially locally.



QCT member church clergy rally to support the Coptic Orthodox Church during a time of crisis for the Christian community in Egypt, January 2010.

QCT is aware that there is a great diversity of events that the various ecumenical groups hold, and seeks to encourage them – community activities, prayer breakfasts, ecumenical cafes, ecumenical retreats, clergy lunches and Lenten studies, ‘Christians in Dialogue’ meetings, combining resources in ministry and joint fundraising events, and other activities surrounding Covenanting documents.

In the context of the national covenanting process that had been initiated by the NCCA, Ray Williamson addressed a meeting of QCT in March 2002 on **Australian Churches Covenanting Together**, and his address was followed by a presentation by four panellists, who spoke about local covenanting in Queensland.

QCT was keen to be part of that covenanting initiative, and saw it as a means by which much more local ecumenical engagement could be encouraged. Through organising conferences, such as *Journeying Together in Ecumenical Collaborative Ministry* in 1995 and *For God's Sake: An Ecumenical Conference on the Local Church at Mission* in 2001, through the provision of resources and information, and by visits to local ecumenical groups, QCT has pursued one of its high priorities, to support local ecumenical initiatives.

These initiatives often take the form of local covenants, which QCT promotes and supports. **Over the years many local covenants have been agreed.** As early as 1995, in Springfield the Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches were working together, and other possible areas for collaborative local ministry were being discussed, such as new housing areas, older established areas in a period of transition, and rural areas where resources were severely limited.

The same four local churches in the Stanley River area entered into their own covenant in 2001, making an annual re-affirmation of it; and there has been a very longstanding covenant between the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Winton. Other local covenants exist between the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches in Redbank Plains (2000), the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Ravenshoe (2001), the Wandoan Lutheran and Uniting Churches (2008), and the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches in Injune (2008).



1. June 1, 2001: Signing of Stanley River Covenant with Bishop John Gerry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, Reverend Bob Warwick Chair of Presbytery of Moreton Rivers, Uniting Church in Australia, Reverend Tim Jaensch, Qld District President of Lutheran Church of Australia, and Bishop Richard Appleby, Northern Region, Anglican Diocese of Brisbane.

2. May 28, 2011: Tenth anniversary celebration with Reverend Andrew Gunton, Moreton Rivers Presbytery Minister, Uniting Church in Australia, Reverend Vince Gerhardy, Lutheran Church, Archbishop John Bathersby, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, and the Reverend Canon Richard Tutin representing the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane and QCT.

In 2009, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and Diocese of Toowoomba and the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane signed a Covenant of Understanding at a ceremony attended by hundreds of people at The Cathedral of St Stephen in Brisbane. It affirms the relationship that has developed over many years and embraces ways to work cooperatively in the future in some areas of common mission.





2009 Covenant of Understanding ceremony at The Cathedral of St Stephen, Brisbane, with Archbishop Phillip Aspinall, Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, Archbishop John Bathersby, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, and Bishop William Morris, Roman Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba. (Photographer: Rene Marcel)

Inter-Church Councils or ‘Churches Together’ are other expressions of local ecumenical initiatives, and these are to be found in Bardon, Caloundra, Clayfield (that dates from 1984), Mackay and District, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Stafford, Toowoomba, Western Suburbs, Woodgate, and there is the Border Council of Churches. While it is not always easy to maintain the enthusiasm of groups in the regional areas, QCT invites all these local groups to send a representative to QCT meetings: only some attend, but all send reports.



Border Council of Churches banner

Of great assistance in encouraging and facilitating more extensive collaboration in rural areas was the 1996 declaration, “**Being Church in Rural Queensland**”. The product of work between four churches (ACA, LCA, RCA, UCA) and their leaders, it is regarded as a foundational statement and affirmation of local ecumenical cooperation by these churches, especially in the vast rural areas of the State. Its release prompted quite a lot of activity in various regions to explore how to build greater cooperation and joint activities in those localities.



In 2009, representatives of those same churches met to explore how best to build on that foundation, producing a new document, “**Living Church in Rural Queensland**”. It was recognised that the priorities set in 1996 had inspired the formation of local covenants and brought people together for worship and ministry. The new document set out strategies and recommended goals regarding worship, religious instruction, pastoral care, and for nurturing ministry. It speaks of the challenge “to think, live and nurture an ecumenical heart”. QCT was an active participant in the drafting of this document, and has an on-going vital role to engage in and support implementation of the recommendations contained in it.

THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

In 1989, the QECC had resolved to reconvene the Faith & Order Commission, asking it to seek to identify and discuss ways of responding to current issues in the life of Queensland from a theological perspective. Then, at its first meeting, QCT adopted the Faith and Order Commission of the QECC as the body for Faith and Order work within QCT. Following the example of the new NCCA, in 1995 the QCT changed the name of this Commission to '**Faith and Unity**', and recognised it as a **core commission of QCT**. Its mandate is to act as a theological reference group, exploring and strengthening the theological basis of all activities of QCT, assisting the member churches to share their faith, foster Christian unity through dialogue and develop a deeper understanding of each other's tradition.

However, it is not always easy for theological commissions of state councils readily to identify appropriate tasks, and this commission experienced that problem. In 2000, the AGM requested the Commission to explore the topic of 'authority', and on a completely other matter, in 2001 the Commission produced "Guidelines for Ecumenical Worship". It seemed indicative of a lack of clarity of purpose, and with the increasing busyness of its academic members, the Commission entered a period of hibernation.

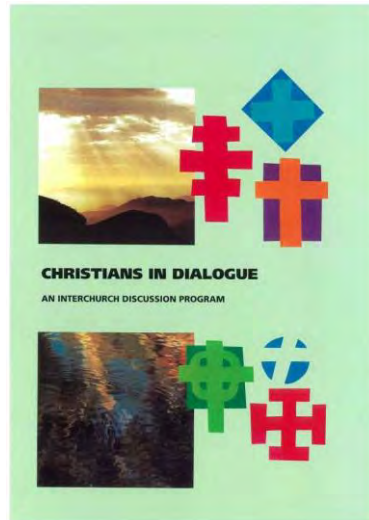
Its reactivation occurred in August 2005, and since then it has met regularly. It decided to work on producing a brochure to provide orientation for clergy and lay leaders wishing to take up one of the 'packaged courses' such as "40 Days of Purpose", and this was finalised in 2007. The group discussion material "Christians in Dialogue" had begun as a project of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and Anglican Diocese in 1985,

though soon joined by both the Lutheran and Uniting Churches.

In 2006, the project came under the oversight of QCT, whose Faith and Order Commission then undertook a review of the material, looking at each study to assess current relevance. This project was completed in 2010 with an affirmation of the studies for use in the churches. When “**Christians in Dialogue**” was begun back in the 1980s, the first studies were based on BEM, but it grew to cover a wide range of topics, sixteen in total, relevant to Christian unity.

In addition to these, the series now includes one prepared in 2006 by Rockhampton Churches Together on the NCCA Covenanting Document, and one on the history of the ecumenical movement and current church relations, put together by Toowoomba Churches Together in 2007.

In 2005, QCT initiated a new opportunity for dialogue, called *QCT Dialogues*, to bring people together to consider topical issues and their theological implications and to do so in an ecumenical framework. The first had an environmental focus: “Creation, Communion and Consumerism”.



During 1995-6, QCT took an active part in a project that was being coordinated by the NCCA Commission on Mission in preparation for the WCC World Mission and Evangelism Conference in Salvadore, Brazil in late 1996. The theme of that conference was “Gospel and Cultures”, and QCT participated in the Australian project to engage people in local churches in exploring that theme in their own context. The QCT group reported that, having surveyed a number of people across the state, it was found to be a difficult and diverse subject, but the findings were made available through the churches and fed into the national project which then shaped the Australian presentation at the WCC conference.

In 2003, it was reported to the AGM that the establishment of a Liturgical Commission had not progressed due to the lack of a quorum at key Executive meetings.

PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP

QCT provides a witness of the unity of its member churches to the wider community through the fulfilment of another of its aims, namely, prophetic leadership, by showing concern in the face of issues of broader community significance, taking practical action and engaging in advocacy in the interests of justice.

Women

In her first report as General Secretary in 2005, Glenine Hamlyn concluded: “Finally, there is one ongoing concern I wish to share with you. I would urge you to continue to engage prayerfully with the issue of gender and leadership in your churches, preparing women for leadership roles (to the extent that these are possible in

each case) as part of a long-term plan to strengthen the participation of women in the life and decision-making of QCT members. This cannot be approached only in an ad-hoc fashion and will not simply happen on its own. I would also encourage you to find creative and brave ways of examining the language used in your services and other forms of spiritual expression, making the effort to find inclusive ways of speaking that do not imply a loss of theological clarity. We need to do some hard theological work on this issue, which I believe is a justice issue. Yet I believe too that it can be a wonderfully enriching exercise for all of us.”

Through such a strong statement, Glenine was both summarising and giving renewed priority to issues with which ecumenical bodies had been dealing for some time. In 1989 the QECC had formed a committee for the WCC initiated Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1989-98). At its first meeting, QCT received a report from that committee, and agreed to continue its work as an important aspect of ecumenical life in Queensland.

After the completion of the Decade a review was conducted, and in 2001 QCT adopted a recommendation to establish an on-going group to continue to bring relevant issues before the member churches. At that same 2001 meeting of QCT there was a special panel presentation, “Women’s Voices on Gospel and Culture”, during which the Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project was highlighted.

Unfortunately, by 2003, it had to be reported to the AGM that the establishment of a Women’s Issues Working Group had not progressed due the lack of a quorum at key Executive meetings.

Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Programme

However, one gender issue - domestic violence - continued to be addressed in a very active way. Having commenced when seven churches got together in 1991 to establish the project, the training programmes conducted by the project made a significant impact. A 'Train the Trainer' Programme was produced, and 120 people had availed themselves of the training in two and a half years. Funding from the Queensland Government had been received, but was cut in 1997, and so it was up to the churches to determine whether the project was still wanted. The answer clearly was affirmative, because by 2005 it had become a Commission of QCT.

This programme does not provide intervention or shelters; it simply provides information and training, put together by people with experience and understanding in the field of domestic violence, focussing on different elements of domestic violence: its relationship to the theologies we preach, its relationship to the society in which we live, ways of presenting information about domestic violence within a church or congregation, and resources that exist for the support of victims and perpetrators. Workshops for school chaplains have been initiated and other resources provided, In 2010, this QCT Commission produced a revised and up-dated version of a booklet first published in 1994, "Questions Women Ask about Domestic Violence and Christian belief".



JCDVPP Project Worker Amanda Moss with original Project Worker Alana Bolger at the 20th JCDVPP anniversary revised booklet launch on August 9, 2011

It is a resource primarily to assist Christian women who are victims of domestic violence, and it is accompanied by a CD-ROM that provides contemporary Queensland-based case studies in relation to domestic violence and the churches, enabling clergy and pastoral workers to address the situation whenever it is disclosed.

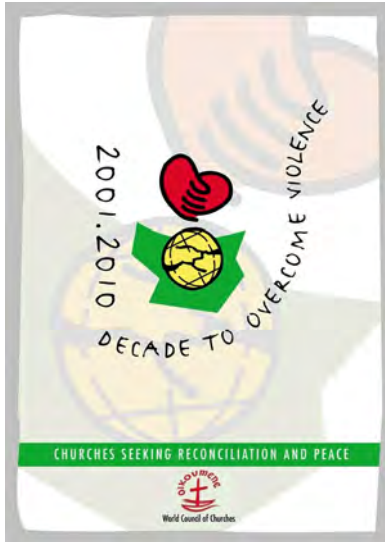


Decade to Overcome Violence

At the Harare Assembly of the WCC in 1998, the churches' delegates had resolved that the WCC member churches be asked to observe the first decade of the 21st century as a Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010) – violence in all its forms.

At the outset, QCT noted that the Decade had been launched, and that it was time to build on the significant expressions of support that had already been received from congregations. It was recommended that congregations throughout the State could identify a local starting point (e.g. bullying behaviour) in their community where they could begin to work to overcome violence.

Nationally, the NCCA established a DOV Working Group, with two members representing the state ecumenical councils, of whom one was the Reverend Val Graydon from QCT, and QCT indicated its willingness to become a channel of communication between the NCCA and QCT member churches regarding the initiatives that were being taken.



QCT took the initiative for the WCC programme – ‘On the wings of a Dove’, for the elimination of violence against women and children - to be taken up in Brisbane in the form of a ‘16 stations’ prayer campaign, which the NCCA helped to organise. Local churches, organisations and individuals were encouraged to choose one of the 16 days and to use the focus prayers, liturgy and rituals around

the subject matter for that day. The campaign was taken up again in 2005.

Also in 2005, the major QCT project for this programme was a half-day workshop for Chaplains from Church Schools, youth workers and RE teachers. The focus was the effect on children witnessing domestic violence.

Churches Together Indigenous People’s Partnership

There had been an Aboriginal and Islander Commission of QECC, so addressing issues relating to the situation of Indigenous People and reconciliation in Australia was not new to the ecumenical engagement of churches in Queensland. However, six months after QCT was formed a far-reaching development occurred for the whole Australian society. On 3rd June 1992, the High Court gave its ‘Mabo Judgement’, ruling that the land title of Indigenous Peoples is recognised as common law.

It was this judgement, and another Aboriginal death in custody the following year, that led a small ecumenical group to come together as the “Churches Together Mabo Group”. Initially the group was concerned with raising awareness within the Church of the need for reconciliation and a better understanding of the issues surrounding Native Title, deaths in custody, racism and social justice. Thus, the role of the “Churches Together Mabo Group” was to bring churches into contact with justice issues that affected the way of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It sought also to collaborate with other organizations in the pursuit of justice.

Although this group was not formally constituted within QCT, QCT actively supported the development of this work, and in early 1995 endorsed a proposed ‘Project 2000’, a strategy aimed at providing ongoing funding and resourcing of an Aboriginal Partnership Coordinator.



Joan Hendriks

By that time, Mrs Joan Hendriks, was working one day per week in this role, but resources were required to make it more extensive and permanent. It was she, together with Fr Gerry Hefferan, who addressed the QCT 1996 AGM, referring to the lack of understanding which had been displayed in the wider community at that time. Appealing to the Christian’s hunger and thirst for justice, they spoke of the need to build sound relationships, based on mutual respect and understanding, expressed in genuine caring and sharing, supported by effective communication.

QCT responded at that meeting by stating that “all delegates present expressed their concern that, in recent days, strong racist attitudes have found expression in our society. As Christians we cannot but deplore any lack of respect for any group of people or the pitting of one racial group against another. We suggest that, in our churches, we need to look deep into our hearts to examine our own attitudes and actions in the light of the gospel”.

At the end of 1996, the High Court brought down another very significant decision. Its judgement in the Wik case ruled that Native Title was not extinguished by pastoral leases and could co-exist with them. This ruling created sharp divisions in the Australian community, and was particularly disruptive in Queensland, especially in rural areas. The churches’ natural desire to see justice for indigenous people caused many others to feel the churches were also working against them in relation to these matters, and this meant there was a great need for sensitivity.

Nevertheless, QCT did proceed with the development of this programme. The Roman Catholic Church, through Caritas Australia, agreed to fund Joan to work for three days per week from September 1997, and she was to be based in the QCT office. Some other QCT member churches subsequently gave their financial support as well. By 2001 it was deemed appropriate that what had begun as the “Churches Together Mabo Group” be integrated into QCT as “Churches Together Aboriginal Partnership” – a move that also was more likely to secure its future! So it became a Commission of QCT, and thus also an expression of QCT’s commitment to continuing involvement in the work of reconciliation. In 2003, the name was changed to ‘Churches Together Indigenous People’s Partnership’, in order to reflect the inclusion of Torres Strait Islander people.

In the mid-1990s, the Australian Council for Reconciliation had defined 'Reconciliation' as being "about forging a new relationship between the wider community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – one that heals the wounds of the past and ensures a fair go for all". This, too, was Joan's constant message in her role with QCT. She spoke of the "deep rooted spiritual connectedness of Land as Life for the Indigenous peoples of Australia as the essence of our very being" and of how the "spirit of reconciliation requires that there is an understanding of the sacredness of the land and the connectedness of people with God through the whole of God's creation. Only then will there be a true sense of accepting that Australia has a blemished history that has caused the need for Reconciliation between the Indigenous peoples and others in this land".



2011 Reconciliation Service, The Cathedral of St Stephen, Brisbane

Under her leadership, this QCT Commission became a vital resource to communicate the urgency of understanding the situation of Indigenous people in this country and attitudes of non-Indigenous people to them. The Commission's importance was frequently noted as the only programme in the churches in Queensland that introduces non-Indigenous Australians to the concerns of the Indigenous – although it also was recognised that there was always the risk that non-Indigenous people would be under the misapprehension that this Commission was only for Indigenous people. Further, the uniqueness of CTIPP is in its firm aim to provide education for non-indigenous Australians – and to offer that ecumenically.

Joan built significant networks in the wider community to promote reconciliation in Australia. In 2002 she was elected as chair of Reconciliation Queensland, and she became increasingly involved in an advisory capacity on important decision-making bodies behind the scenes, e.g. Police Liaison team. Of special note is the support she garnered for the people of Palm Island – an Aboriginal community that had become symptomatic of the poverty and injustice endured by Indigenous people – especially in the context of the unrest stirred by a death in custody in 2004 and the controversy surrounding it.

Joan retired in 2005, and deep appreciation was expressed for the work done by this Commission through Joan's leadership, not only within church groups but also in the community.

Ms Georgia Corowa is now the Coordinator of this Partnership, with the voluntary support of Sister Joan Murphy who, for many years, has been doing research and administrative tasks as well as assisting in some aspects of the programme. The major part of that programme currently is the conducting of workshops for churches and ecumenical groups that have been shaped

by a consultation in 2009 between Indigenous pastors and other community people and QCT representatives. A Schools Project is designed to help students reflect on issues arising from the Northern Territory Intervention; and there has been work on Indigenous Funerals, negotiating with Church Leaders, drafting protocols and recommendations. In the aftermath of the recent floods a good deal of assistance has been given to Indigenous people to enable them to get access to relief and in providing them with goods, for which an appeal to parishes has elicited a generous response.



1.
Sister Joan Murphy



2.
*Georgia Corowa,
CTIPP Co-ordinator*

Education

Providing chaplains in state schools was an initiative undertaken by Scripture Union, but in response to issues raised by Church Leaders concerning this initiative, QCT formed a Working Group within its Ecumenical Projects Team to undertake two principal tasks: to explore options for more effective coordination between school chaplains and the teaching of Religious Education, and to conduct a dialogue with SU on school chaplaincy in state schools.

The responsibility of Local Chaplaincy Committees, the nature of employing authorities (e.g. SU which, already by 1995, was employing 36 chaplains on behalf of local committees), membership of the local committees especially in areas where there was a large number of

church groups, and the fact that the majority of people chosen to serve as chaplains were not from the mainline churches were amongst the key issues of concern by QCT member churches.

Early reports from the Working Group highlighted the importance of the role of the Local Chaplaincy Committees and the crucial nature of the churches' wholehearted participation in them. As a result of this work, over the years there were many new developments in RE and chaplaincy, and with the active interest and encouragement of State Church Leaders by 2010 it was discerned that the mandate of this Working Group needed revision and that it would operate more effectively as a QCT Commission.

So, the QCT **Commission for RE and Chaplaincy in State Schools** was established in 2010 in order to promote RE and chaplaincy in state schools among the member churches and in the wider community and to facilitate dialogue between the member churches and interdenominational agencies and the State Government department in order to promote the highest standards in RE and chaplaincy in state schools.

Also a Tertiary Chaplaincy Working Group was established and in 2006 appointed a Project Officer to follow up on recommendations that came from the State Church Leaders' Meeting.



Glenine Hamlyn at, John Paul College, an ecumenical school, in May 2006.

Rural Communities

In 1996, QCT had on its agenda the crisis facing rural communities, and there was an undertaking to organise opportunities for people in different locations to discuss this crisis and appropriate responses by the churches.

Following one successful conference on Rural Ministry in Toowoomba in December 1996, QCT again had the matter before it in March 1997. There was a keen awareness of the fact that many organisations were withdrawing from small country towns and this was having a devastating effect on local community morale. In such circumstances it was vital that the local church be a stable presence in the community, and ecumenical cooperation was essential for the maintenance of that presence. But here a tension was realistically acknowledged: even in isolated locations, local churches cannot act in isolation from the broader denominational tradition of which they are a part. Hence, the importance of “Being Church in Rural Queensland” giving guidelines as well as encouragement for local cooperation!

A Working Paper was produced in 2009 by a consultation held in Toowoomba, involving members of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Uniting Churches from rural areas around Queensland, particularly from Toowoomba and the Darling Downs. The consultation was called to take stock of progress made since the release of the ground-breaking ecumenical document, “Being Church in Rural Queensland”. A new document was drafted to keep up with more recent developments. It then went to the four churches involved for endorsement.

This process was finalised and the title of the new document is “Living Church in Rural Queensland”. It aims to take the initial process further. “Living Church in Rural Queensland” names areas in which churches can be

encouraged to work ecumenically, such as religious education, pastoral care and creating ecumenical orders of service for particular occasions. Although the document has arisen out of a process of consultation among the four churches mentioned above, it could prove very helpful to other churches in their efforts to forge greater ecumenical unity. The General Secretary of QCT, Ms Glenine Hamlyn, participated in the drafting of the document.



The Environment

The first *QCT Dialogues* in 2005, followed by a multi-faith seminar on a similar environmental theme, was indicative of the ecumenical emphasis being placed on concern about care for the environment.

This was continued in 2006 when QCT together with the RCA Archdiocese's Commission for Justice and Peace held a workshop to examine the Queensland Government's discussion paper on "Climate Smart Adaptation". From that workshop a statement was submitted to the appropriate government department highlighting areas of concern and framing several recommendations.

Relationship with ACC/CWCA

While QCT was naturally desirous to be, and was enthusiastically accepted as, a state ecumenical body within the Australian family of councils of churches, there was sensitivity about the funding relationship. The deleterious fact was that the QECC had had only a few member churches from whom it received very little

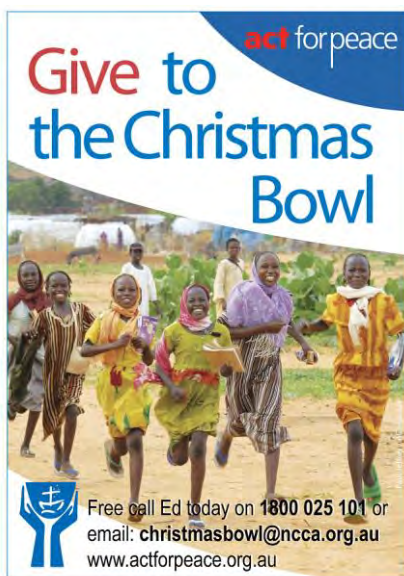
funding and was consequently extremely dependent on the ACC for funding to carry out the promotional and educational work for the ACC Commission for World Christian Action, and therefore that work had to be the major focus of the QECC. Faced with that reality, when a new ecumenical body was being planned for Queensland, it was determined that it should be fully funded by the member churches, without reliance on the ACC. Happily the member churches responded, but the working relationship with the ACC regarding the World Christian Action programmes still needed to be resolved.

At the first QCT Executive meeting a report from the Committee for WCA was received, but the Executive determined that this committee not become a committee of QCT but would continue because of funding from the ACC for the year and because it would be a valuable support group for the General Secretary in development education and the promotion of CWCA programmes in Queensland. At the next meeting, in April 1992, the Executive also came to the consensus that the General Secretary (i) carries out the aims and objects of QCT and reports to and advises QCT on these matters; (ii) acts as Queensland coordinator for World Christian Action and in these matters is to be supported by an appropriate representative committee appointed by QCT. Such matters would not be raised in detail at QCT meetings but may be advised in summary at the discretion of the General Secretary.

The following month it was also agreed that a Refugee support committee be formed as a sub-committee of QCT. It would (i) have access to the ACC through its Refugee and Migrant Services Committee; (ii) act as a co-ordinating body in the sharing of information and the raising of awareness about the nature of refugee support; (iii) enable the proposal of a common policy and assist in joint negotiation on refugee matters;

(iv) administer the grant; (v) through a common commitment build bonds between the churches. It was, however, noted that the three large churches all had their own committees for refugee work.

Then in July 1992, the Executive recommended that “QCT form an office for the operation of the programmes and related work of the ACC CWCA in this state; and that the functioning of this office to be funded by CWCA”. This recommendation was endorsed by the General Meeting in August 1992.



By these various decisions, the relationship between QCT and the ACC for the work of CWCA was established. It was an important matter to be resolved, and the outcome ensured that the aspect of the Church’s mission that the CWCA sought to implement – so indispensable for a holistic approach to ecumenism – was brought within the

ambit of QCT in Queensland. This relationship continued through the transition from the ACC to the NCCA and the newly named Commission for Christian World Service in 1994, and over the years the CWS programmes came to be more broadly recognised as an essential element of ecumenical work and thus more clearly linked with QCT’s broader picture.

Indicative of this was the increasing involvement of the General Secretary (Revd Russell Morris) in the work of CWS.

The tragedy was that, almost as soon as this working relationship settled into a good ecumenical model, unilaterally the CWS Commission in 2007 took the destructive decision to cease to work in partnership with the state ecumenical councils and thus to exclude them from this essential part of the ecumenical endeavour. In spite of all appeals against it, that decision was put into effect in 2009.



*Reverend Tanya Richards, CWS Project Officer,
with the African Women's Forum 2009*

Refugee Network

In 1989, Bob O'Sullivan invited Hermine Partamian, ACC National Resettlement Co-ordinator, to address a QECC meeting. She spoke of ministry to refugees as being a complex challenge that must bring to light the injustice

and abuse of power that gives rise to the circumstances that create refugees. The ministry is a living response to the biblical challenge to share with and be open to the stranger in our midst. Speaking from her own refugee experience, she told of the need for refugees to be met as persons who have been dislocated and disempowered. The churches need to meet them in their need and help them access the language, culture and support networks. She stated that the ACC was committed to a programme of awareness, advocacy and resettlement. She said the ACC sought to avoid the mistake of assuming that people in churches appreciate the needs of refugees, and is thus attempting to establish local networks and resource sharing among refugee support groups. Funds were available to support a part-time worker in networking and resourcing on an ecumenical basis.

There was already a Queensland Refugee and Migrant Support Group, and at this point the QECC resolved that this Support Group be requested to discuss its connection with the QECC with a view to building a closer relationship and greater co-operation.

After the formation of QCT, by 1997 the NCCA Refugee & Migrant Services Committee was looking to the churches to do a lot of work in relation to the government's Community Settlement Scheme.

Then in 1999, Val Graydon opened a discussion as to how QCT might be involved with work with Refugees and Displaced Peoples – a small percentage of the grant from NCCA was allocated specifically for such work, and thus already part of her educational and promotional work. Close links were established with the Sudanese community and some practical activity begun with Sudanese women. But still questions were being considered: What are the ecumenical dimensions of RDP work? What does / can each member church contribute

to this ministry? How can we build bridges between QCT member churches in refugee work? Within QCT at that time, there was strong support for RDP work as an integrated element of CWS activity, but also sensitivity about the need for it to link, but not replace, present member church RDP activities, such as those in the Anglican. and Roman Catholic Churches.

In 2005, the NCCA provided funding for a one-day per week project worker. The overall objective of the project was to promote, facilitate and support increased involvement in support for refugees and asylum seekers at the local congregation level. Thus the primary goal of the work of the Project Officer is the promotion, establishment and on-going support of refugee support groups within the congregations and parishes of QCT member churches. The target set for the initial stage of the project was the establishment of five groups. The development of the network was seen as a key way of promoting awareness of and involvement in the work of supporting refugees and asylum seekers within the churches in Queensland, and therefore for attracting more parishes and congregations to become involved in this ministry.

The goals defined for the network were:

- to assist in educating the wider community by providing accessible information on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers;
- to bring together people from the Queensland churches for the sharing of ideas and to develop collaboration for refugees and asylum seekers;
- to encourage and assist greater involvement from individuals and groups from the churches in supporting refugees and asylum seekers
- to advocate for improvement in the systems and policies that affect refugees and asylum seekers.

YOUTH

In the early to mid-1990s, informal youth networks continue to exist. But in 1997 the Christian Youth Commission ceased to function and there needed to be a fresh look at alternative ways to involve youth. In 1999, it was reported that the Brisbane RCA Archdiocese had initiated a young adult ecumenical task force.

QCT decided to investigate the possibility of re-establishing an ecumenical committee of young adults following the Taizé Youth Event in 2000. Then in 2003, QCT member churches expressed a clear desire for QCT to become more active in working with 15-30 year olds. It was recognised that any future activity could only be achieved in consultation with existing specialists working within the member churches, and it would be important to discover realistic goals for QCT activity in this area. Important questions were raised: How do we engage with a non-joining generation? Would an issues-based approach rather than approaches relying on formal institutional structures have merit?

Youth Coordinators of five QCT member churches met for the first time in September 2010 to share information and ideas about their work. They valued the opportunity, and expressed the intention to meet quarterly. However, while they were cautious about any joint plans at that stage, they were keen to discover areas in which they can pool resources and expertise, or open up their respective activities to young people from other churches.

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND MULTI-FAITH COOPERATION

The interfaith dialogue that had been taking place between Christians and Jews (commenced in 2001 – after a QCT decision to cooperate with the Jewish Board

of Deputies to develop a Council of Christians and Jews in Qld) was extended in mid-2004 to include representatives of the Muslim community in Brisbane – now called the Qld Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims; it consists of representatives of the three peak bodies in Queensland, QCT, the Jewish Board of Deputies, and the Islamic Council of Queensland. This new body had a very promising beginning – “a great sign to the world of today”. In the early part of its life it focussed on building relationships, with the intention of going on to address the kinds of things that are indicated as they discussed the purposes for which they were together, namely, to promote, through education and dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims, an appreciation of each other’s distinctive beliefs and practices and their common ground, and to promote the study of and research into historical, political, economic, social, religious, cultural and racial causes of conflict.

There is cooperation with the Multi-Faith Centre at Griffith University in a number of ways, eg. by participating in multi-faith prayers (each faith delivering its own prayer) after the tsunami or in the framework of Harmony Day. This Centre provides an important space in Brisbane for faith groups to meet and discuss issues of common relevance, making friends in the process. The atmosphere is always one of mutual respect.

A multi-faith seminar was held in 2005 to examine the basis of various faiths with a view to highlight the way in which each faith regards our place in the natural world and our responsibility for it.

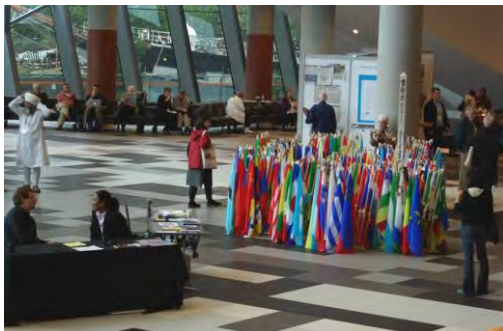
In 2006-7, there was a significant increase in the demands on QCT regarding multi-faith activities, especially because of the Queensland Government’s ‘Abrahamic Faiths Forum’. This was attended by almost 200 people and was very successful in broadening understanding of each other and building relationships.



Bishop Jonathan Holland, Northern Region, Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, Imam Uzair Akbar, and Rabbi Jaffe at the Abrahamic Faiths Forum, Parliament House, Brisbane, 2007.

Nowadays the need for churches to engage with people of other faiths in their communities is rarely questioned. For the good of the whole *oikumene*, bonds of peace must be forged beyond the media slogans and prejudices that pervade the public sphere. At the same time “[i]nterfaith dialogue will reinforce the consciousness of Christian identity and place denominational differences into perspective. The ability of the churches both to acknowledge their differences and to discover their unity as members of the one Body of Christ will help them meet members of other faiths and appreciate what God has accomplished.”² Hence ecumenism and interfaith dialogue are intrinsically linked.

² *One Faith – Multifaith A theological basis for multifaith gatherings.* Faith and Order Commission of the Victorian Council of Churches, 2005



Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne, December 2009, attended by General Secretary, Glenine Hamlyn.

For QCT it is not a question of whether there is engagement with people of other faiths, but in what form and to what extent it occurs. What priority does this area of activity occupy relative to the pursuit of ecumenical unity between the churches, not to mention activities relating to justice issues such as those addressed by the CTIPP and CWS programmes? QCT recognises the need to find the balance between pro-active and reactive involvement, weighing up the pros and cons each time.

It is pleasing to note that through these activities relationships are slowly being built up. It is vital to engage in dialogue and build relationships. One without the other is insufficient. This could no doubt be said not just of interfaith dialogue but of any ecumenical endeavour.

Ray Williamson

Conclusion

QCT continues to build upon the foundations enacted in 1991. The work of the Commissions is an important aspect of its life as is the ongoing support of local ecumenical groups and activities.

The Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project also celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2011. Its contribution in raising awareness of this hidden aspect of church and community life has been greatly appreciated. The demand for its resources continues to grow.

The Chaplaincy and Religious Education in State Schools Commission is providing information and support as a result of the High Court challenge to the funding of chaplains in state schools by the Federal Government. Two commission members attended the challenge in Canberra on 11 August 2011 and have produced a comprehensive report of the proceedings for the Executive and Heads of Churches.

The work of Churches Together Indigenous People's Partnership continues to provide a link between Indigenous and the wider church communities. The conversation and dialogue is forging new relationships and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

The challenge for all member churches is to find people willing to be involved in the work of the commissions. The Faith and Unity Commission is, at the time of writing, in need of new blood and has challenged member churches to encourage and provide a new generation of theologians to be part of its work and conversation.

The growth of interfaith dialogue since the events of 9/11 in 2001 has increased the importance of the Qld Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Its membership continues to find new understandings of the traditions and practices of each faith. This is important as the world grapples with the fundamentalist elements that threaten peaceful coexistence and cooperation.

The beginning of QCT's 21st year heralds a new phase of its life and activities. The Reverend Canon Richard Tutin (Anglican) began his term as General Secretary in October 2011. He is the first Anglican to have held the position and we look forward to his contribution to QCT's life and work.

QCT could not exist without the commitment and enthusiasm of its member churches. Its basis and aims developed twenty years ago are as important now as they were in 1991. The challenge for all is not to rest upon the laurels of past achievements but to build on the foundations that have fostered ecumenism at all levels of church life.



The Reverend Canon Richard Tutin, representing QCT at the 2011 Queensland Week Multi-Faith Ceremony, Brisbane.

QCT Past General Secretaries

1992-1996	Helen Mills
1997-2004	Rev Russell Morris
2004	Rev Don Whebell
2004-2011	Glenine Hamlyn
2011	The Revd Canon Richard Tutin

QCT PAST PRESIDENTS

1992	Bishop James Cuskelly (RC) Rev Hans Spykerboer, Canon James Warner
1993	Bishop James Cuskelly (RC) Rev Hans Spykerboer, Canon James Warner (died 1993)
1994	Rev Hans Spykerboer (UCA) Bishop Ron Williams, Pastor Rick Strelan
1995	Prof Hans Spykerboer (UCA) Bishop Ron Williams, Pastor Rick Strelan
1996	Pastor John Vitale (Luth) Archbp. Peter Hollingworth, Rev Don Whebell and Rev David Pitman
1997	Archbp. Peter Hollingworth (Ang) Archbp. John Bathersby, Rev David Pitman
1998	Rev Dr David Pitman (UCA) Most Rev John Bathersby and Rev John Vitale
1999	Bishop Michael Putney (RC) Pastor John Vitale, Archbp. Peter Hollingworth
2000	Bishop Michael Putney (RC)
2001(March)	Pastor Tim Jaensch (Luth) Rev Ray Reddicliffe (or Rev Don Whebell), Bp John Gerry
2002(March)	Rev Ray Reddicliffe (UCA) Bp John Gerry (replaced Aug 2002 by Bp Brian Finnigan), Bp Ron Williams
2003 (August)	Bp Brian Finnigan (RC) Bp Ron Williams, Pastor Tim Jaensch
2004 (August)	Bp Richard Appleby (Anglican) Pastor Tim Jaensch, Lt Col Ed Dawkins

2005 (August) Pastor Tim Jaensch (Luth)
Lt Col Ed Dawkins
2006 (March) Lt Col Ed Dawkins (Salvation Army)
Rev Dr David Pitman
2007 (March) Rev Dr David Pitman (UCA)
Fr Anastasios Bozikis, Bp Brian Finnigan,
2008 (April) Fr Anastasios Bozikis (Greek Orthodox)
Bp Brian Finnigan, Bp John Parkes
2009 (April) Bp Brian Finnigan (RC),
Canon Richard Tutin, Pastor Stephen Nuske
2010 (April) Canon Richard Tutin (Anglican)
Pastor Stephen Nuske, Lt Col Ray Wilson
2011 (April) Lt Col Ray Wilson (Salvation Army)
Pastor Stephen Nuske, Rev Bruce Johnson