



## Report from **Synod Ecumenical Relationships Committee**



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### Context

As its name suggests, the Synod Ecumenical Relationships Committee (SERC) is called to focus upon our relationships with Christians beyond the Uniting Church. Its work essentially is rooted in the *Basis of Union* which states:

*The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Uniting Church recognises that it is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission.*

The work of the committee has particular relevance for Synod goals for the formation of ministry and resource sharing.

# Report

SERC in Queensland found a new lease of life in 2015. The committee consists of Rev David Baker (moderator and chairperson), Rev Dr Clive Ayre (secretary), John Agnew, Neil Ballment, Nathan Barton, Pastor David Busch, Rev Sunil Kadaparambil (Cunnamulla), Pastor Richard Lance, Aaron Moad and Rev Russell Morris. Meetings are held on alternate months with an average attendance of seven members; teleconference facilities are occasionally used. The committee is acutely aware of the lack of female members.

## Review and planning

The year 2015 began with a special review and planning meeting. This canvassed a range of options and priorities for activity over the next several years. One outcome was the decision for a major focus on intercession. After some extensive discussion about possible projects, the following plans were agreed:

- Working with other committees as a basic approach; behind that would be receptive ecumenism, post-denominational issues, stories, and the Queensland Community Alliance.
- Promotion of a Covenant of Intercession; the possibility of obtaining copies of Lukas Vischer's 1980 book *Intercession* published by the World Council of Churches (WCC). If our people pray, other possibilities will follow.
- The possibility of action regarding "Together Towards Life".

## Covenant of Intercession

In 1980 Lukas Vischer's book *Intercession*, published by the WCC, opened with this question: "Could the divided churches not give expression to the communion which already exists among them by praying regularly for one another?" Vischer also stated that "the Church should become a real sign of reconciliation in the world". As a result of the committee's initiative, with the cooperation of Queensland Churches Together (QCT) and the approval of the WCC, Vischer's book has been republished by Morning Star Publishing in Melbourne with a new foreword by Canon Richard Tutin (QCT).

On 30 January 2015 SERC agreed on the following resolutions:

1. That we call on our congregations to commit to praying quite deliberately for other parts of Christ's church in their area.
2. That all congregations which acknowledge Christ be invited to share in this reciprocal form of prayer, and to that end agree to the regular exchange of information and points for prayer.
3. That this commitment be made publically in the form of a Covenant of Intercession in which all participating denominations would share.
4. That all congregations be urged to explore ways in which they can foster a sense of fellowship with fellow Christians beyond the Uniting Church.
5. That all congregations be invited to explore the question: How can we as Christ's people be "a real sign of reconciliation in the world" where we are?

The 2015 version of *Intercession* clearly has national and international implications, but the key features of Queensland's proposed Covenant may be summarised as follows:

- Vischer's book and an accompanying study guide are the primary resources.
- The program, with a new ecumenical website, was launched in October 2015 under the banner of One in Christ with presbytery ministers in attendance.

- A prayer wall will be encouraged, featuring images of church leaders and those from other faiths, political and community leaders.
- A PowerPoint presentation has been prepared as a resource.

This program will clearly be a significant focus over the next several years. After it is established in the Uniting Church, it is hoped that other sections of the church will also become involved. A positive outcome may be the revitalisation of an ecumenical vision.

### **Communication**

Through the secretary, the committee has renewed contact with other similar committees in Queensland and interstate, including of course the national office. This includes the exchange of minutes and the forwarding of information from the national office. Several members attended a national conference in Melbourne in October 2015.

### **Membership of QCT commissions**

SERC spent some time in arranging Uniting Church nominations for various committees and commissions, most notably for QCT. Once again, that has not gone unnoticed.

### **Presbytery representatives**

Since Queensland is such a large and decentralised state, the committee is in the process of arranging for an ecumenical representative in each of the presbyteries.

### **Ecumenical dinner**

In 2015 the Uniting Church hosted the annual ecumenical committees dinner. That was a successful event held on 8 September at which the moderator spoke about his ecumenical journey.

### **In conclusion**

The committee in Queensland is in good heart with more than enough to keep it occupied for the next several years.

## **Key achievements/initiatives**

1. The re-publication of *Intercession* by Lukas Vischer.
2. The creation of an online study guide based on *Intercession*.
3. The launch of the One in Christ program – the Covenant of Intercession.
4. Renewed contact with interstate and other denominational ecumenical committees.
5. A successful ecumenical dinner.

## **Challenges/risks as we progress**

1. A perceived decline in ecumenical interest and commitment in Australia.
2. The need to encourage our people to share in the Intercession initiative.

## Issues to be addressed

1. Ways of promoting the ecumenical vision in line with the *Basis of Union*.
  2. Ways of promoting the prayer covenant without any funding backup.
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