



Victorian
Council of Churches

Council News

May/June 2020

Victorian Council of Churches

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Reflection

During this passed week I have experienced three occasions where the sense of companionship was palatable .. In a meeting, over coffee and in a email exchange with a friend. On each occasion the moment was transformed—moving from the tasks at hand to something much deeper, much more Life giving.

Here in Australia we are invited to experience something similar by entering into two societal moments, one is that we're in the season of Pentecost with all the rich imagery and experience of being caught up into the mystery of life in the Spirit, of being called to be ambassadors for our Lord's Kingdom.

The other moment is the call to acknowledge the first nations of this land and to recommit to the urgent task of reconciliation, of ensuring that all who call this land we live, work, play and worship on, have a sense of belonging and being honoured for the contribution they bring to the whole of society.

Both moments call us to decisive choices... to allow the Spirit to lead, guide and inform. Whilst also allowing the voices of others to clarify, guide and inform.

As people committed to live as disciples of Jesus may we be found to be 'In this together' with others on the road....

- Ian

I am currently establishing my diary for July —Dec 2020 and would welcome opportunities to come and share stories of the Council activities with your Church or organization – you can contact me on 03 9650 4511 or email at ian.smith@vcc.org.au

News from the Council

- In the midst of this unprecedented period of history the Victorian Council of Churches continues to seek to serve the member churches through whatever means it can.
- The VCC continues to be represented in consultations with State Government over the most appropriate ways of ensuring societies safety during this time
- The VCC facilitated a Victorian Church Leaders meeting during Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, where some 18 leaders prayed together, shared how the various denominations were travelling in these unprecedented times and released a joint statement.

The office has now temporarily closed with Rev Ian Smith working from home— Ian is still contactable by phone, email or What's App.

VCC—new Contact details

- phone: 03 9650 4511 or 9412 8487
- email vcc@vcc.org.au
- Web www.vcc.org.au
- Facebook www.facebook.com/viccouncilchurches

NOTE: The Victorian Office now has a new PO Box number.

- postal address PO Box 6804 509 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne 3004

Reflection from the President



There is much talk about the Covid19 pandemic, and many questions are asked as to how we as Christians understand such suffering, many have spoken about it as the wrath and punishment of God on man. Such an understanding distorts our understanding of God, we know that God is love and that he "desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." 1Timothy 2:4-5. All things work for the good of those who love God!.

The following is a wonderful explanation on how to understand illness by the Theologian Jean-Claud Larchet (The Theology of illness)

"Among human affairs," Saint Cassian writes, "nothing merits being held as good in the true sense of the word except virtue, which leads us to God and makes us adhere to this immutable Good. On the other hand, there is no evil other than sin, which, by separating us from God Who is Good, unites us to the devil who is evil." (Saint John Chrysostom).

It is true that physical health corresponds to the normal state of human nature--that is, its prelapsarian state--and for that reason health can be considered as good in itself. (Saint Maximus the Confessor). Nevertheless, from another point of view health is worthless to the human person--it does not constitute a true good but is only good in appearance--if it is not used well, that is, if it is not used with an aim toward the Good: to fulfill the commandments of Christ and to glorify God. This is why Saint Basil declares: "Insofar as it does not render good those who possess it, health cannot be counted among those things that are good by nature." In fact it is evil if it contributes to making a person indifferent to his salvation, keeps him away from God by giving him the false impression that he is self-sufficient, and bestows on him that strength of the flesh which actually weakens, rather than giving him that weakness in which God reveals Himself, which constitutes true strength (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Health is an even greater evil if it is used to give free rein to the passions, thereby becoming an instrument of iniquity (Romans 6:13). "Know, then," Saint Gregory of Nazianzus counsels us, "how to despise an insidious health that leads to sin."

As for illness, it is in itself something evil to the extent that it arises as a consequence of the sin of Adam and as an effect of demonic activity within the fallen world. As such, it is a negation of the order God intended when he created the world and mankind. Nonetheless, it is evil only on the level of physical nature and the body. If one does not give oneself over to it entirely, illness cannot injure one's soul, nor can it affect one's essential being, one's spiritual nature. According to Christ's own teaching, a person should fear whatever can make him perish in Gehenna both body and soul, but he need have no fear of what can affect his body alone, without bringing death to his soul (St. Matthew 10:28). By itself illness does not have the power to separate man from God; therefore from a spiritual point of view it cannot be considered to be a source of evil in his life. Saint John Chrysostom notes: "If the soul is in good health, bodily illness can in no way harm a man." Illness, then, is only evil in appearance. (St. John Chrysostom). It can even constitute a blessing for man in the sense that, if one uses it appropriately, one can draw from it considerable spiritual benefit, thereby making what was originally a sign of mortality into an instrument of salvation. (St. John Chrysostom). Saint John Chrysostom adds: "There is evil which, properly speaking, is not evil, even though it bears that name: such as illness, and other things of that sort. If they were truly evil, they would not be able to become for us the source of a multitude of blessings." (Saint John Chrysostom). In the same vein Saint John Cassian states: "How can we see [in illness] something that is essentially evil, since it serves as a blessing to so many by granting the means to attain to abundant and eternal joy?"

Finally, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus offers the following counsel: "Do not admire every form of health, and do not condemn every illness."

Consequently, in certain cases and from the point of view of that which is spiritually good for man, illness can be paradoxically considered as a higher good than health and therefore as preferable to health. (Saint Barsanuphius). Saint Gregory of Nazianzus observes that the aim of medical treatment "consists in reconfirming health or the good condition of the flesh if such exists, or in recovering it if it has been lost. But it is not clear that these advantages are really useful. Often, in fact, the opposite conditions are more advantageous to those who are affected by them." Accordingly, we encounter any number of holy people, faced with their own illnesses or the illnesses of those in their care, who ask God not in the first place for a return to health, but for what is spiritually the most useful. And rather than lament because of these illnesses, they rejoice in the benefits that can be drawn from them.

Such an attitude, however, presupposes that we attribute to illness a meaning and a finality that transcend physical nature.

To consider illness strictly as a phenomenon unto itself is almost inevitably to see it in a negative, sterile light; and this only increases the physical suffering and moral pain which result from a sense of its absurdity. The consequence of such an attitude is generally to leave the way open to activity of demons and to develop in the soul troubling passions, such as fear, anxiety, anger, weariness, revolt and despair. These states not only do not relieve the body, they most often increase the symptoms of the evil that affects it, thereby creating sickness even in the soul (St. John Chrysostom). The illness then serves no good at all, but it becomes for the ill person a source of spiritual deterioration which puts his soul in jeopardy perhaps more than it does his body.

It is because of this very danger that the Fathers stress the point that "it is not in vain, not without reason that we are subject to illnesses." This is why they encourage us to be vigilant when illness strikes, and not to trouble ourselves first of all with their natural causes and means to cure them. Rather, our first concern should be to discern their meaning within the framework of our relationship to God, and to throw light on the positive function they can have in furthering our salvation. In this respect Saint Maximus the Confessor counsels: "When you are exposed to expected testing...search out its purpose and you will find the means to profit from it." The ideal, then, is to avoid from the beginning allowing ourselves to be dominated by suffering when it exists, but to go beyond the limits in which the suffering tends to enclose the soul and even our entire being, our entire existence. In this double perspective Saint Gregory Nazianzus offers the following counsel to an ill acquaintance: "I don't wish and I don't consider it good that you, well instructed in divine things as you are, should suffer the same feelings as more worldly people, that you should allow your body to give in, that you should agonize over your suffering as if it were incurable and irredeemable. Rather, I should want you to be philosophical about your suffering and show yourself superior to the cause of your affliction, beholding in the illness a superior way towards what is ultimately good for you."

To be philosophical about one's illness and suffering means above all for a person to consider what they reveal to him about his condition. elevates the soul to participate in it. Thus Dostoyevsky can write: "A healthy man is always an earthly, material man...But as soon as he falls ill, and the normal, earthly order of his organism is disturbed, then the possibility of another world makes itself known to him at once; and as the illness worsens, his relations with this world become ever closer."

Understood and experienced in this perspective, illness does not crush a person under the weight of their "mortal body" (Romans 7:24), but to the contrary turns the person toward God. It reunites the person to God, drawing him toward God as the true source and end of his existence. It offers wisdom to his intelligence--that is, true knowledge of the world, of himself and of God--and to his will it offers conformity to the Will of his Creator. "God does not permit illness to debase us," Saint John Chrysostom declares, "but because He wanted to make us better, more wise and more submissive to His Will, which is the basis of our salvation."

May the Love of God the Father, the Grace of His Only Begotten Son and the gift and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Fr. Shenouda Boutros.



President's reflection

**WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
24-31 May 2020**

"They showed us unusual kindness." (Acts 28:2)

Loving and merciful God,
you hear the cry of the poor...

[Read More >](#)



Psalms - Bible Study

Bible Study on Psalms from the World
Council of Churches
Psalm 42: Longing for God and Psalm 43:
Prayer to God in Time of Trouble

[Read More >>](#)

Multifaith Leader's Statement on COVID-19

Media Statement 15 May 2020

In this time of uncertainty and increased anxiety the The National Council of Churches in Australia has joined together with organisations of many other faiths to share a united voice.

"Compassion is at the heart of our faiths. It is our unifying ethic."



NCCA continued

Program Updates



Update on Safe Church Workshops During COVID-19

As you are aware, all face to face Safe Church training had to cease due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been working hard on the best way to adapt our training for these challenging times, and even though we are beginning to see a softening of restrictions in our States and Territories, NCCA is committed to offering a safe alternative for ensuring our churches remain safe churches. The training is simply called Safe Church Workshop, and the Power Point slides have been adapted for presentation via Zoom. The workshop is hosted by two presenters, and consists of three sessions conducted in two parts (approximately 1.5 hours each session, and held across two separate days). A Certificate of Completion has been created to validate the training (valid for 12 months from date of training), and acknowledges the uniqueness of this period of time (COVID-19).

It has been great to see our regional presenters and churches in action, as they present Safe Church training in this new format. Thank you to the Catholic Diocese of Bathurst NSW, and Fusion Australia, Orange NSW for getting the ball rolling.

Please contact [Deb Duncan](#) for more information on running or participating in a workshop.

NCCA Safe Church Newsletter

Do you enjoy reading this newsletter? Do you know others who might enjoy reading it?

Please pass on the newsletter and ask them to subscribe. Click [here](#) and enter your details to subscribe.



[Season of Creation 2020 Celebration Guide, “Jubilee for the Earth,” now available](#)

A new guide for eco-theological worship resources and activities for the 2020 Season of Creation is now available, thanks to a wide array of ecumenical partners, including the World Council of Churches (WCC). A webinar, “Jubilee for the Earth: New Rhythms, New Hope,” is also planned for 8 June.



[WCC honours legacy of Rev. Norman Bent](#)

“It was with sorrow that we received the news about the passing of Rev. Norman Bent,” said Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). “Through his tireless ministry for reconciliation, justice and peace, Rev. Bent leaves behind an inspiring legacy for the global ecumenical movement.”



[“A Light of Peace” prayer campaign for peace in Korea](#)

01 March - 15 August 2020 Worldwide

World Council of Churches invites member churches worldwide for global prayer for peace on the Korean Peninsula, “A Light of Peace”, from 1 March to 15 August

Announcing the 2020 Canadian School of Peacebuilding

We would like to invite you to join us at the 12th annual Canadian School of Peacebuilding (CSOP), which will be held June 8-12 and 15-19, 2020, in Winnipeg, Canada. Registration is now available online or using our PDF forms at csop.cmu.ca/registration/.

We welcome anyone who is interested in growing as a peacebuilder—local and international, students, professionals, and community volunteers, seasoned practitioners, and those brand-new to peacebuilding.

As one CSOP participant has said, “CSOP is an incredible opportunity to learn across faith traditions, cultural understandings, and rural and urban settings. Here, the world comes alive in the classroom, and one is inspired to live differently even after stepping foot out of the classroom.”

Our [five-day courses](#) this year, as always, touch on a range of topics, taught by [amazing instructors](#) from around the world:

Session I: June 8-12, 2020

Indigenous Politics, Land, and Globalization

Instructor: Rauna Kuokkanen

Leading in an Age of Polarization

Instructor: David Brubaker

Active Bystander Training

Instructor: Joy Meeker

Session II: June 17-21, 2019

Does Religion Cause Violence?

Instructor: William Cavanaugh

Dreaming of Kanata and Canada:

Indigenous Graphic Novels & Reconciliation

Instructor: Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair

Trauma, Healing, and Reconciliation

Instructor: Kelly Bernardin-Dvorak

In the past, some of our courses filled up before the deadline, so we encourage you to [apply early](#) to ensure your choice of course.

If you have any questions or want more information, check out our [website](#) or send us an e-mail. We hope you will join us in June for a week (or two) of learning, connecting, and renewal.

Wendy Kroeker
Director, Canadian School of Peacebuilding

csop.cmu.ca
csop@cmu.ca



The Victorian Council of Churches acknowledges that it lives, works, plays and shares fellowship on the lands of the 1st Peoples of this land.

Bargargung, Yorta Yorta, Ladji Ladji, Gunditjmara, Kerrupjmara, Gunai Kunai, Watha Wurrung, Widjubuk, Wemba Wemba, Daung Wurrung Dja Dja, Wurong, Wurunderri, Burring peoples of Victoria

We honour all 1st people leaders past, present and those emerging.

The Council once again commits itself to the work of reconciliation amongst all peoples who call Australia home, recognising the unique place our 1st peoples have in this land.

Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network



During these unprecedented times PIEN invites you to view a number of significant films :

See all details at www.pien.org.au

Always on the move, never uprooted



The NSW Ecumenical Council warmly invites you to participate in

Meditative Prayer using the Songs of Taizé

Friday,
12th June, 2020
6.00 – 6.45pm
[Australian Eastern Standard time]



Using Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6048830385>

Meeting ID: 604 883 0385



NSW Ecumenical Council
Serving the churches in NSW & ACT

Jewish Christian Muslim Association

Donations

JCMA is a not-for-profit organisation and donations go directly towards delivery of our many events, forums and conferences and to support our workshop programs in primary and secondary schools. As a listed harm prevention charity we have DGR (Deductible Gift Receipt) status. Your donations are tax-deductible (donations over \$2 are tax-deductible). If you would like to make a donation to help support the work of JCMA please go to our website <http://jcma.org.au/donation>.

JCMA Membership

JCMA is a membership based organisation for Jewish, Christian and Muslim people of faith. If you would like to find out about joining JCMA as a member you can go to our website at <http://jcma.org.au/jcma-membership> or call Ginette Everest on (03) 9287 5590 or email to: memberships@jcma.org.au.

For more information and details on any events see website: www.jcma.org.au



It's Ration Challenge time again go to www.actforpeace.org.au

Above is a picture of Fares Swais, executive director of DSPR Jordan.

By participating or supporting the Ration Challenge you are helping people like Fares who is working with people in Jordan who are in desperate need of help.

More details at www.actforpeace.org.au

Image credit: Ben Littlejohn/Act for Peace

UCA CHILDREN & FAMILIES MINISTRY – June Update

During these unusual times here are some great resources

New, Free and Very Worth Opening

[Connecting Families, Nurturing Faith \(UCA\)](#)

[Understanding Generation Alpha \(McCrindle\)](#)

[The impact of Covid-19 on emerging generations \(McCrindle\)](#)

[Returning to church: a trauma-informed approach \(UCA\)](#)

[Covid-19 and current church FAQs \(UCA VicTas\)](#)

Some Practical Ideas

[20 Zoom game ideas for households](#)

[35 ways to love your neighbours right now](#)

[155 animated Bible stories \(Saddleback Kids\)](#)

[5 tips for on-line ministry with younger generations](#)

[1 Story to consider: The Great Realisation \(Tomfoolery\)](#)

Tools You Might Find useful

[Kahoot – free game-based learning](#)

[Sribbl.io – free drawing game](#)

[Slido – free polling platform](#)

[Menti – free quizzes and polls](#)

[Wordle – free tool for generating word clouds](#)

Covid-19 Corner

[Pulse mail for families \(Pulse\)](#)

[Quizworx home delivery \(Quizworx\)](#)

[Faith at home through play \(GodVenture\)](#)

[Pentecost ideas for worshiping at home \(CRCNA\)](#)

[How your children & families ministry can emerge from Covid-19 stronger \(CRCNA\)](#)

Brilliant Ideas from Messy Church

[Messy Round-the-World Adventure \(youtube\)](#)

[Messy Church at Home: ideas \(Pinterest\)](#)

[Messy Church at Home: science \(Messy Church\)](#)

[Messy Church at Home: resources \(Messy Church\)](#)

[Messy Church at Home: Get Messy! \(Messy Church\)](#)

Australian Student Christian Movement

Opinion and reflection

Review of Alan Demack, *Pulpit, Pew and Public Life*

Alan Demack AO, *Pulpit, Pew and Public Life: The Christian and the Secular Nation*, MediaCom Education Inc, Unley, S.A., 2019

Alan Demack's memoir entitled *Pulpit, Pew and Public Life* takes the reader, firstly, on a journey through the author's formative years which were deeply influenced by the Australian Student Christian Movement. He expresses a deep appreciation for the inspiration of his Christian discipleship provided by such fine theologians as J. H. Oldham, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Emil Brunner. (On pages 181-184 he provides an extensive list of a wider range of Christian contributors.)

Alan studied law at the University of Queensland (1953-57) and in time he became a barrister and then a judge.

In 1976 Alan was appointed a Senior Judge of the Family Court of Australia. In 1978 he was appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland and Central Judge.

He served as a judge in Queensland for some 28 years, and even in retirement has been active in being a valued consultant in regard to important legal issues.

Nurtured in the Methodist Church, Alan and his wife Dorothy (whom he met at a National ASCM Conference in Armidale) have been very active members of the Uniting Church of Australia. Alan also contributes as a lay preacher in the Uniting Church. As well, both Alan and Dorothy have maintained a lifetime of support for ASCM.

This book explores the interplay of law, theology, ethics and public life in the context of living in a 'secular nation'. It contains many insights and thoughtful reflections on the inter-relation of those important dimensions of Australian experience. The book repays thoughtful reading.

Available for \$22.95 from [MediaCom](#).

Ray Barraclough

Child Protection Unit, Department of Health and Human Services

Reporting to protect children

Mandatory reporting is about protecting children. Children can carry the trauma of abuse for years, unless they get help. They need the adults around them to report child abuse and neglect.

You might have noticed some media attention in September this year about new laws passed by the Victorian parliament to do with reporting child abuse. The media focussed on priests, but actually the law will cover people in religious ministry in the various faiths across Victoria.

If you are ordained, appointed or recognised as a religious or spiritual leader a religious organisation, this new law will apply to you. You will become a mandatory reporter to Child Protection in early 2020.

If a mandatory reporter believes a child might be at risk of physical injury or sexual abuse and their parents are not protecting them, they have to report what they believe to Child Protection as soon as they can, even if information came through religious confession.

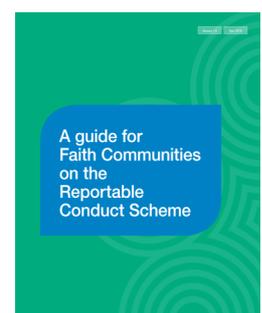
To make a report you do not need to be sure or have any proof. You just need to be genuinely worried the child might be at risk. It is up to Child Protection to decide what to do. Your identity will be confidential, and the law protects you from any liability if the report is made in good faith.

Child Protection workers are trained to assess risk to children from child abuse and neglect. They will decide what to do about what they are told. They might give you some information and advice. They might refer the family for support. They might investigate the report. They can do what is needed to protect the child. Often, Child Protection can arrange the help parents need to keep their children safe. Sometimes children might need Child Protection to step in to protect them.

Find out more on the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) website <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting> - or search 'mandatory reporting victoria'

There will be free information sessions about mandatory reporting for people in religious ministry early next year. Bookings will open soon. Keep an eye on the mandatory reporting website.

Please click on the image, right, for a downloadable pdf document of the Reportable Conduct Scheme



The Victorian Council of Churches through its Executive Officer, Rev Ian Smith, played a major role in the development, writing and delivery of this document. The VCC recommends all churches and church agencies familiarise themselves with their obligations under the Legislation.

Training portal at www.childsafestandards.org.au
Downloadable resource kit available on website

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The Victorian Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*** If you have an event that you want others to know about then contact at vcc@vcc.org.au excluding January we plan to publish a Council News each month ***

Council News is the official newsletter of the Victorian Council of Churches

Editor Rev. Ian Smith Executive Officer

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We're on the web!

www.vcc.org.au



Victorian
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Contact us: web. www.vcc.org.au

Email. vcc@vcc.org.au

Facebook www.facebook.com/viccouncilchurches/

The new Office

The office of the VCC is now level 6, West Tower, 608 St Kilda Rd.

Access to the building is via the right hand drive to the rear double glass doors.

If you wish to visit please ring 9412 8487 or 0408 313 618 and arrange at time.