

National Dialogue for Christian Unity

Constitution

September 2014

1. Name

1.1 National Dialogue for Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand ("NDCU")

2. National Office

2.1 The National Office of the NDCU shall be at the Methodist Church of New Zealand, 409 Great South Road, Ellerslie, Auckland or at any such other place in New Zealand as the NDCU may from time to time determine.

3. The Basis

3.1 The NDCU is a gathering of churches which confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and commit themselves through the Holy Spirit to fulfill Jesus' prayer (John 17:21), "that they may all be one so that the world will believe", to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

4. Objects

4.1 To explore the significance of Jesus' prayer for unity and truth by:

- a. Seeing the search for Christian unity as a moving beyond what we can do within our own denominational and theological traditions, to a moving out, a journeying into uncharted territory where we are not alone, but experience the company of others on the same journey, with the Holy Spirit as our guide.
- b. Deepening our relationship with each other in order to express more visibly the unity willed by Christ for his church.
- c. Working together towards the fulfillment of our common mission of worship, witness, proclamation and service in the world.

4.2 Notwithstanding anything else contained in this Constitution, no power or reservation expressed or implied in this Constitution shall authorise the NDCU or any Member Church to do or suffer any act which does not further the Objects of the NDCU.

5. Strategies

5.1 Encouraging te whanau a te Karaiti to see their need to journey together with the Holy Spirit as they seek to express what it means to live out the unity Christ wills for his church.

5.2 Enabling the Member Churches to develop their existing relationships by raising awareness in their churches of Christ's gift of unity, and the call to express that unity through prayer, dialogue, and shared understandings of and engagement in mission.

5.3 Giving expression to the koinonia that the Member Churches already enjoy.

5.4 Sharing and receiving the gifts which each Member Church has to offer.

5.5 Encouraging and enabling the Member Churches in the light of the Gospel to offer prophetic leadership to each other and the community by:

- a. addressing moral and social issues; and
- b. responding to human need and acting on issues of justice, peace and creation.

5.6 Promoting relationships with:

- a. Non-Member Churches, and other ecumenical entities within Aotearoa New Zealand; including New Zealand Christian Network and Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand National Forum;
 - b. Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi (the Maori ecumenical council); and
 - c. International ecumenical organisations.
 - d. People of other living faiths.
- 5.7 Encouraging and undertaking joint initiatives as determined from time to time by the Member Churches.

6. Membership

- 6.1 Membership of the NDCU is open to those churches which accept the Basis, Objects and Strategies as detailed in this Constitution, and have their own national organisation and ecclesial identity ("Member Churches").
- 6.2 A church which does not have creedal statements within its tradition and therefore may not formally subscribe to what appears to be a written creedal statement, may become a Member Church of the NDCU provided that it demonstrates by its life and conduct that it upholds the spirit of the Basis.
- 6.3 The representatives of Member Churches will determine whether a church seeking to join meets the criteria outlined in the above two paragraphs for being a Member Church.
- 6.4 Other national Christian organisations with an interest in Christian unity and who share the Basis of the NDCU may be accepted to be participating observers.
- 6.5 The NDCU may revoke the membership of a Member Church where there is consensus or majority agreement from all Member Churches except the Member Church whose membership is or may be revoked.
- 6.6 A decision to revoke a member under clause 6.5 will be made in accordance with Part 13 of this Constitution and the term "full consensus" under clause 13.3 will be read to exclude the Member Church whose membership is or may be revoked.

7. Context

- 7.1 The NDCU takes the context of being churches in Aotearoa New Zealand seriously. Our country is distinctive in its history and cultures. Our society is marked by rapid change, increasing cultural and religious diversity, and the growth of secularism. The call to a more visible unity of the churches and a common commitment to God's mission in the world, which form the basis of the NDCU, are to be fulfilled by taking our particular context seriously.
- 7.2 Significance is to be attached to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for churches and the wider society.

8. Powers

- 8.1 The NDCU has power:
- a. To purchase, take on lease, hire or otherwise acquire and hold any lands, buildings, easements, patents, patent rights, trademarks and any other real or personal property, and to construct, provide, maintain, repair and alter any buildings, works, stores, plant and things within New Zealand.
 - b. To improve, manage, develop, deal with, mortgage, exchange, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any property or rights of the Association.
 - c. To invest any monies and funds of the NDCU in accordance with the Objects and Strategies of this Constitution.

- d. To borrow or raise money with or without security for any of the Objects of Strategies outlined in this Constitution.
 - e. To receive donations, grants or property from individuals or groups supporting the NDCU or from Member Churches.
 - f. To enable the establishment of a trust which has objects which are aligned with the Objects and Strategies of the NDCU and to enable the donation of funds from the NDCU to the trust.
 - g. To receive and accept donations, endowments and gifts of land, buildings, stocks, funds, shares, securities, money and any other assets, whether subject or not subject to any special trusts or conditions, and in particular to accept and take by way of gift and absorb upon any terms the undertakings and assets of any society or body, whether incorporated or not, carrying on work similar to any work for the time being carried on by the NDCU, and to undertake all or any of the liabilities of any such other society or body.
 - h. To do all such other acts and things as are or may be deemed incidental or conducive to the attainment of any of the Objects or Strategies of the NDCU or the exercise of any of its powers.
- 8.2 The exercise of all powers is subject to agreement being reached by the Member Churches in accordance with part 13 of this Constitution.

9. Theological Basis

- 9.1 The document *Towards a Theology for Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand* (in Appendix 1) sets out the current theological basis on which the NDCU is formed. It is not a definitive or final statement, rather a working document to guide the life of the NDCU.

10. Ecumenical Space

- 10.1 Meetings of the NDCU shall be conducted in keeping with the spirit of ecumenical space as outlined in the statement, *Towards a Theology of Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand* (in Appendix 1).

11. Ecumenical Hospitality

- 11.1 The NDCU is to be a place where ecumenical hospitality is extended by the representatives of each Member Church to the representatives of other Member Churches. The NDCU encourages ecumenical hospitality between Member Churches at national and local levels. It will also seek to extend this ecumenical hospitality to the wider community and society, especially those who are or may become disadvantaged and oppressed.

12. The Churches and the National Dialogue for Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand

- 12.1 The Annual Forum of the NDCU seeks to create an ecumenical space where the spirit of hospitality prevails and Member Churches give expression to koinonia or community by entering into lively contact with each other, giving expression to the significant bonds which already exist amongst them, and sharing with each other their union with God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
- 12.2 No Member Church is asked to forsake or compromise its own ecclesiology. The NDCU will however encourage Member Churches to enter into dialogue, at various levels, about the understanding of the church which each holds.
- 12.3 Through dialogue in the forum the Member Churches seek to broaden their knowledge of each other, extend their recognition of each other, find ways of giving expression to what

they hold in common, and move towards a more visible expression of the unity Christ has given to his church.

- 12.4 Representatives of Member Churches to the NDCU have a responsibility to both the NDCU and their Member Churches. Within the NDCU they are responsible for representing the views of their church and for contributing to the life and work of the NDCU. Within their own church they have a responsibility to represent the life and work of the NDCU.
- 12.5 Member Churches are encouraged to be inclusive and reflect the diversity of their churches in appointing representatives to the NDCU.

13. Decision making

- 13.1 All decision making will take place at the Annual Forum or at the Executive Meeting.
- 13.2 At least one representative of each Member Church must be present for any decision to be made.
- 13.3 If a Member Church is not represented at an Annual Forum or Executive meeting, that Member Church may vote on any decision in writing (either by letter or e-mail) within 15 working days after the Forum or Meeting.
- 13.4 Decisions in the life of the NDCU are made by consensus. Only when all Member Churches say 'yes' or agree to 'stand aside' on a proposed action will the NDCU move ahead on such a proposal.
- 13.5 A consensus decision making process emphasises the process of listening and discussion and is not merely a matter of saying yes or no. Several responses to any proposal are possible in consensus decision making which include but are not limited to:
 - a. Yes; meaning a Member Church will support the proposal and not do anything to undermine it;
 - b. No; meaning a Member Church cannot, in all good conscience allow the proposal to go forward; or
 - c. Stand Aside; meaning a Member Church has reservations, but not enough to keep the NDCU from accepting the proposal, and will do nothing to undermine the decision;
- 13.6 The NDCU can decide to make a decision by majority vote of Member Church Representatives if there is a full consensus of Member Churches to do so.

14. Register of Member Churches

- 14.1 When the NDCU comes into being, it will keep a register of Member Churches, participating observer organisations, and other Christian organisations the Forum may relate to, and details who each one is and what they exist to do.

15. Annual Forum

- 15.1 The NDCU will hold an Annual Forum gathering for representatives of Member Churches.
- 15.2 The role of the Annual Forum is to give expression to the life and work of the NDCU as expressed in its Basis and Objects.
- 15.3 The participants in the Annual Forum will be:
 - a. National Heads of Member Churches (or their nominated alternatives) – one for each church.
 - b. Representatives appointed by Member Churches – with a maximum of four (4) representatives per Member Church. (*amended by Annual Forum 27Feb2019*)

- c. Recognised participating observers from national Christian organisations – up to three (3) observers for each organisation.
 - d. Other observers who accept the basis of the NDCU and who are accepted for registration by the Chairperson.
- 15.4 Member Churches are encouraged to be inclusive and reflect the diversity of their churches in appointing representatives to the forum.
- 15.5 Decision making at the Annual Forum is by the representatives of Member Churches only. Participating observers shall not be involved in the decision making at an Annual Forum.

16. Special Forum

- 16.1 A special Forum shall be called at any time by a Member Church where it considers:
- a. necessary having regard to the Objects and Strategies of the NDCU; or
 - b. a written request is received from a Member Church to call a special forum and it is considered necessary by the representative of that Member Church to do so as outlined in 15.3 (a) & (b).
- 16.2 At least 14 days' notice in writing of such a forum shall be given to each Member Church and national Christian organisation, together with an explanation of the reason for the forum and the matters to be addressed at the forum.

17. Forum Executive

- 17.1 The Annual Forum will appoint an Executive which shall consist of one representative per Member Church together with the Office Holders.
- 17.2 The Executive will meet at least twice a year, between Annual Forums, to further the life and work of the NDCU. It will report to and be accountable to the Annual Forum.

18. Office Holders

- 18.1 Nominations for Office Holder positions will be made by representatives of Member Churches at the Annual Forum.
- 18.2 The Office Holders of the NDCU shall be elected by the Annual Forum in accordance with the decision making powers in Part 13 above from those nominated within the Member Churches and will include:
- a. the Chairperson;
 - b. the Secretary; and
 - c. the Treasurer.

19. Finance

- 19.1 The Member Churches of the NDCU will have responsibility for ensuring that normal running costs of the NDCU are adequately funded.
- 19.2 Each Member Church shall make annual financial contributions to the NDCU according to guidelines established by the Executive and approved at the Annual Forum.
- 19.3 In the event the NDCU ceases to exist and is dissolved, all remaining funds, after payment of any and all liabilities, will be distributed to the Member Churches in equal shares regardless of the Member Churches varying levels of financial contribution.
- 19.4 No pecuniary profit shall be made by the NDCU and any excess or residuary funds will be applied for the fulfilment of the Objects and the performance of the Strategies of the NDCU in a manner which is agreed upon by the Forum Executive.

19.5 The Member Churches of the NDCU will ensure that financial accounts are maintained and reviewed.

20. Amendments to the Constitution

20.1 This Constitution may be amended where there is full consensus of all Member Churches who either vote for an amendment or stand aside when an amendment is proposed.

21. Dissolution

21.1 The NDCU will not be dissolved except by consensus agreement in accordance with part 13 of this Constitution.

Appendix 1

Towards a Theology for Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand

*As agreed at the 8 September 2010 meeting
of the National Dialogue for Christian Unity*

Introduction

It is comparatively easy for churches to agree on doing some things together, to engage in interchurch activity. It has proven more difficult to explore theologically what separates us as well as what we hold in common, in such a way as to further the visible unity of Christ's church on earth. It is hoped this document will serve the deeper theological discussion that needs to take place.

At the outset we recognise that ecumenism, as we now understand it, has not only to do with the unity of the church but also the unity of the whole of creation. This is in keeping with the Greek word 'oikoumene', from which our word ecumenical comes. It means the whole inhabited earth, or living household of God. This wider understanding of ecumenism and unity invites us to mission, mission to all God's people and the whole of God's creation.

Developing a contextual understanding of what it means to seek the visible unity of the church, and to engage in mission together, will be an ongoing challenge to any future instrument for unity in this land. A key question will always be "What is the Spirit calling us to be and do together as churches here in the Aotearoa New Zealand context?"

All dialogue calls for deep mutual respect; normally this grows as participants get to know one another better as people and at the level of faith. This respect is essential because theological dialogue is a conversation with the aim of laying hold of truth more firmly. This means the dialogue cannot be a negotiation nor a settling for the lowest common denominator in belief. Basic convictions of faith must not be diminished in dialogue but preserved; dialogue must never become a relativisation of truth or an indifference to it.

We are aware of the need to be sensitive in the language we use. Dialogue should offer the opportunity to interpret to each other the theological and doctrinal language seen by our churches to be necessary for expressing the faith. Here loyalty to the truth can lead dialogue partners to reappraise their own heritage, to challenge one another, as well as to seek to overcome distortions or misunderstandings that may have come about as a result of polemics from the past. On occasion it may be possible to find new language in which to express what has been discovered to be a now common understanding. At the same time this will always be governed by the awareness that the Christian faith is given, not made up by us. It will be important not to take for granted that all have the same theological understanding of commonly used terminology nor give it the same weight; e.g. church, mission, liturgy, culture, authority, unity.

Mission-shaped unity

The imperative for Christian unity is mission-shaped. The unity of the church witnesses to God's power to reconcile. The unity of the church also serves the unity of humankind and the integrity of creation. Ecumenism calls for a rich, mutual interdependence. How can one part of the body say to another "I have no need of you"? (1 Cor.12:21) Ecumenical instruments seek to enable Paul's understanding of church to be a reality: "If one part of the body suffers, all suffer together." (1 Cor 12:26) and as another witness says, only the whole church can proclaim the whole gospel.

Both mission and unity, which ecumenism serves, are integral to the life of the church. When ecumenical activity is mission-shaped it is accountable to God's purposes. When mission is given priority it will give birth to expressions of ecumenical life that are open to faith sharing, relationship healing and building, as well as justice making. A mission-shaped ecumenism will always take the context of this time and place seriously. It will provide an environment for consultation and collaboration on finding ways to express God's love and justice in our own particular situation.

Those who come after us depend on our obedience now. Those who went before us on the ecumenical journey challenge us in the form of the Lund principle expressed as a question. "Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?" (A Word to the Churches, 3rd World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund, 1952)

Biblical basis

The Scriptures of the First Testament affirm God as creator who has a passionate interest in the well-being of creation. Diverse experience of God's grace is witnessed to in traditions of covenant and liberation, law and prophecy, wisdom and apocalyptic. God's concern for the unity of humankind and all living creatures is seen in the covenant with Noah. (Genesis 8:9) Through Abraham all nations will be blessed. (Genesis 12:3) At the same time the Scriptures acknowledge that God has called Israel to a special vocation to be "a light to the nations." (Isaiah 49:6) The prophets speak of God's vision of shalom when nations will "beat their swords into ploughshares." (Micah 4:3) In God's new creation the "wolf and the lamb will feed together." (Isaiah 65:25)

In the New Testament God's love for the world in all its confusion and brokenness is focused in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He proclaimed the reign of God (Luke 4:21); the disciples acknowledged him saying "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33) and testified that in him "the Word became flesh." (John 1:14) As the followers of the Way reflected on the significance of Christ they came to see that the Good News was to be shared with Gentiles. Paul wrote of our being given a ministry of reconciliation: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." (2 Corinthians 5:19) In John's gospel Jesus prays for his followers: "...that they be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me..." (John 17:23)

Theological foundations

God, the Holy Trinity, does not give up on the vision of shalom proclaimed by prophets and embodied in Jesus. God continues to search for ways in which this damaged world might be healed and find its fulfillment. The church is the first fruits of God's new creation. Unity is a gift of and the will of God, and is at the heart of the gospel. If we have been reconciled to God through Christ, then we are called to show forth this reconciliation. We are aware that our life can deny the gospel we proclaim. The church is a *koinonia* - a community, a communion of those who have been drawn into the life of God through Christ. In this *koinonia* our relationship with God is nourished and our relationship with other members of the Body of Christ is characterised by a shared faith, hope and love. The church keeps alive the disturbing memory of Jesus, including his mission to the poor, marginalized and oppressed. The unity of the church serves the unity of humankind.

This dynamic *koinonia* in the Holy Spirit rejects injustice in God's world and within the church as contrary to the divine intention. The unity prayed for by Christ is not a bland or regimented uniformity. Because God's creation is multiform and God's own life is characterised by relationship, God's purpose celebrates diversity. The church welcomes the rich variety of gifts that all peoples bring to the *koinonia* of Christ. If unity is experienced as oppressive or violent it cannot be the unity of Christ. Visible unity does not require the extinguishing of any particular identity. Our task is to find models of this *koinonia* that witness to a unity that preserves freedom. Examples of such models are 'reconciled diversity' and 'conciliar fellowship'.

Spiritual experience

Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit the last century has seen Christians, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, become aware of the scandal of division, bigotry and isolation. As the Holy Spirit has shaped ecumenical encounter we have discovered that what we hold in common is greater than what separates us. Prayer is the basis of ecumenism because it calls us to be open before God and our sisters and brothers. We have come to see that a proud self-sufficiency is alien to the gospel. A new humility has been born among us that rejects the spirit of triumphalism and ethnocentrism. We embrace the insight that each ecclesial tradition, though existing in good faith and integrity, is partial. Each has gifts to offer the wider church and each is enriched through a willingness to receive. The ecumenical spirit nurtures a catholicity in which we come to know each other, respect each other and cherish each other. A unity in diversity is possible where no spiritual treasure is lost.

As pilgrim people we are given companions for the Way not of our own choosing. Some have a very different experience of God's grace in different locations and times. Those who belong to sacramental traditions recognise baptism as a basis for ecumenism which stimulates a longing to gather around the same Eucharistic table. Yet all, including those not from sacramental traditions, draw encouragement to work for the visible unity of the church from reading the scriptures and from prayer inspired by the Spirit. We have reached the point in our ecumenical journey where we know that "There is a recognition of an already existing real, though imperfect, communion between the churches." (Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life and Witness 5th World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de

Compostella, 1993.) The challenge now is to recognise the apostolic faith in the life of those from whom we are separated and to assist them to see the same faith in our common life. Ecumenism calls us to be prophetic housekeepers of God's creation especially in our own social and historical context.

Ecumenical space

In recent ecumenical discussion some significance has been attached to the concept of “ecumenical space”. This refers to the setting in which, even in a state of division, churches witness to their common allegiance to Jesus Christ and cooperate together to further the visible unity of the church. It is in this space that our common Christian identity is affirmed. It is here we can talk together in a new way, with a greater opportunity to discern together Christ’s will for the church, in ways that are not possible in isolation from one another. This is a space where there is commitment to overcome former divisions and search for unity. It uses the process of dialogue to achieve transformation and renewal in the light of our common quest.

In the midst of divergent affirmations, “ecumenical space” encourages us to seek to maintain fellowship with each other. This is the space where frank and serious discussion that embraces questioning and listening, searching and discovering, takes place. In this space no church is required to deny its identity or heritage. Here we refrain from judging one another as churches. The opportunities of “ecumenical space” include reconciliation of memories, renewal of the churches, common witness, guidance into the will of the Spirit, and discernment of what will advance the visible unity of the church. There are certain obligations that go with being together in this “ecumenical space”. They include: compatibility of attitude and behaviour within and outside the space; making sure our actions are consistent with brotherly and sisterly relationships; and a fostering of mutual support, forbearance and accountability. We need more, not fewer, of these “ecumenical spaces” at this time.

Appendix 2

Achieving the immediate goals

The National Dialogue for Christian Unity has suggested the following as a possible way of beginning the life of the NDCU . The proposal is to spend time getting to know one another and to begin to take each other seriously on a theological and doctrinal level. It begins with a time of confessional sharing. Later it should be possible to move on to meetings with formal agreed themes.

First phase: Confessional Sharing - getting to know one another theologically.

This could take place over the course of a year or more with a couple of meetings, ideally of two or three days each. A representative of each confession represented on the Churches Forum for Christian Unity in Aotearoa New Zealand would make a presentation, with opportunity for questions and discussion.

Ideally each presentation should include a prepared paper available to participants beforehand. A secretary appointed for the process would record discussion. Out of this could come themes for further joint study and discussion.

The papers for the first stage of confessional sharing might be prepared by taking into account the following or similar:

- confessional documents
- revelation/scripture/tradition
- Jesus Christ/the Gospel
- the commandments/the moral life
- grace and the spiritual life

The advantage of having such a list would be to help move the dialogue towards common areas for future discussion.

The approach envisaged here gives full account to the reality of each participating confession in an open encounter with other confessions; it allows the participants to express their own distinctive heritage so that they may share it with others. This can help open up the next stage in the dialogue and can look to the growth of communion by an eventual exchange of gifts between churches as these are found to complement each other.

Second phase: Dialogue Discussion

Ideally the themes for this phase would begin to emerge from phase one. There should be a small working group of two or three, including the secretary, to see to this. Topics such as the following might be envisaged:

- unity/the goal of ecumenism/dialogue
- the Church -- visible/invisible
- revelation/teaching authority
- scripture/tradition
- mission/evangelisation