



**Sharing our Dream  
Downunder**



**11<sup>th</sup> International Interchurch Families Conference,**

**Newcastle, Australia**

***Sharing Our Dream Downunder***

**Noah's on the Beach, 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2005**

**CONFERENCE REPORT**

The Newcastle Conference far exceeded all the expectations of the organising committee. The three days event was truly a *Sharing of Our Dream Downunder* with participants together with those who came from *Upover*.

- All speakers provided excellent input in a program designed to be interactive
- The participation of registrants was high
- The chairperson and facilitator kept everything moving along interesting and interactive lines
- The venue with its beach and ocean views gifted all with the perfect spring weather formed by the One Creator
- Prayer was insightful
- The African altar cloth gave a sense of presence from the continent from which so many enquiries were received but no participants were able to attend.
- The Saturday Evening Catholic Vigil Mass and the Sunday Morning Eucharist in the Anglican Christ Church Cathedral were special celebrations on a special occasion for the special cases which all present represent
- Cathedral image of newly baptised grandchild presented to the pews by proud grandmother for a blessing from us all, a heart warming sign of three generations of an interchurch family
- The presence of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle, Michael Malone and Anglican Assistant- Bishop of Newcastle and co-chair of AustARC, Graeme Rutherford for the whole of the conference was highest endorsement and brought many favourable comments
- The support and participation of the newly appointed Anglican Bishop of Newcastle Bishop Brian Farran and Robin, his wife
- Gratitude for the gift of many Australian and also New Zealand Roman Catholic Bishops who sponsored interchurch couples to attend was expressed frequently
- Gracious words from Cardinal Cassidy who, as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was responsible for the Directory for Ecumenism which was so important for interchurch families without which none of us might have been here in Newcastle. His obvious excitement as he stated, speaking without prepared notes, that when the

Directory was being written, there was no thought of the contribution interchurch families make to Christian Unity, and how observing this in action at our conference, was rewarding for him

- The support and insights from Anglican, Uniting Church, Presbyterian , Lutheran and Roman Catholic Heads of Hunter Churches
- Conference Dinner graced by Lord and Lady Mayoress of Newcastle, Mayor of Lake Macquarie, a cardinal, three bishops, and leading clergy, a sign of the co-operation to be found between church and community in our region
- Greetings and welcomes at the dinner included those from
  - [Archbishop Bathersby](#) – Roman Catholic Co-chair of IARCCUM
  - [Anglican Archbishop Roger Herft of Perth](#),
  - President of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations, and [Bishop of Townsville. Michael Putney](#),
  - [Rev Dr Ray Williamson](#), Executive Secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council who attended the whole conference,
  - as well as greetings from the Hunter Heads of Churches President Bishop Michael Malone, The Lord Mayor of Newcastle, John Tate and the Mayor of Lake Macquarie Greg Piper
- Meals, accommodation and entertainment were of superior quality
- Almost last but not least the warm friendship and bonding we cemented as we wandered in the perfect Sunday spring sunshine among kangaroos, koalas and birds in the bushland setting of Blackbutt Reserve, followed by a BBQ lunch at a Lake Macquarie home overlooking the water
- Almost last again, impromptu discussions by most of the attendees late Sunday afternoon on where to go from here
- Decision that Australian families will gather in September 2006 in Victoria, organised by Margie Dahl and Jeff Wild
- Impromptu lakeside evening meal, transport to Noahs with full orange moon shedding light brilliantly upon the ocean.
- Farewell breakfast and goodbyes on Monday.

There was altogether a warm and rich sense of three days in which we experienced the closest thing we have known to real Christian Unity.

The [Conference Aims](#) were fulfilled

- **To bring interchurch families, their supporters and clergy from across Australia to a first meeting**  
*Achieved.* Representatives from Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales as well as New Zealand gathered.
- **To enable an exchange of experiences between Australian interchurch families and similar families from around the world**  
*Achieved.* Most of those present were involved in presentations of their lived experiences many of which are on attachments to this report. Every experience was unique evidence of families living as “domestic church”
- **To commence a dialogue with Australian church leaders on how the churches might further support interchurch families.**

*Achieved.* Some sessions dealt with this aspect especially.

- **To commence a dialogue with Australian church leaders on the role the lived experience of interchurch families can play in the realisation of Christian unity.**

*Achieved.* Saturday was devoted to the dialogue between the Uniting Church and the Roman Catholic Church which produced the report published as *Interchurch Families – Their Ecumenical Significance and Challenge for the Churches*. It is anticipated that, due to this conference, clergy from Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches who were present will encourage their Church bodies to produce a similar report for which this one has been a precursor

## **KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS AND FOLLOWING SESSIONS**

**Rev Dr Gerard Kelly**, President of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, presented his [commentary](#) on the **Rome Document** [\*Interchurch Marriages and Christian Unity\*](#). The [background](#) on this important document was presented by Dr Ruth Reardon (UK). The original document may be viewed on the Interchurch Families Web page. This document formed the basis for Friday sessions.

This session broke into a discussion on the Rome Document between Anglican Bishop Graeme Rutherford, [Rev Dr Chris Budden \(UCA\)](#), Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Malone, on their view of this document.

*The Lived Experience as Families* session which followed was an opportunity for Dr Ruth Reardon to share the effect of the Rome Document on the international scene, for Melanie and Richard Finch to speak on *Children and Sacraments*, and for couples from Western Australia, Canada and Sydney to speak about their lived positions.

*Healing Hurts: The Lived Experience in Some Australian Dioceses* was a time for hearing at first hand about the effects of diocesan norms where the bishop has followed the injunction in the Directory for Ecumenism which asked them to provide Diocesan Sacramental Guidelines in countries where the Catholic Bishops' Conferences have not provided them:

- [Brisbane](#) (Presented by Pat Mullins),
- Broken Bay (Presented by [Sr Trish Madigan OP](#)),
- [Maitland Newcastle](#) (Presented by [Bishop Michael Malone](#)),
- [Rockhampton](#) (Presented by Marion Davies).

Discussions in small groups gave all present an opportunity to express diverse opinions on the practical implication of the Directory for Ecumenism and Diocesan Norms. The responses are [linked](#).

Session Three afforded an opportunity for clergy from different denominations to share they way they perceive hurts may be healed by virtue of the diocesan norms provided in our dioceses:

- Roman Catholic (Rev Greg Arnold)
- Anglican, ([Rev Peter Ashley Brown](#))
- Uniting Church (Rev Chris Budden)
- Lutheran (Rev Michael Grosas);and

- Presbyterian (Rev John Webster)

The input provided a lively experience led by the facilitator Vivienne Llewellyn Most expressed surprise at what they were hearing here, and the level of agreement was a plus for future Christian Unity, if all clergy can become tuned to, and informed about, the messages presented here.

Theological Implications and Practical Outcomes for the day were summarised by Rev Dr Gerard Kelly.

**Saturday** commenced with a session entitled *Towards Realising Our Dreams* which explored practical efforts in Australia to further implement norms from DAPNE. [Elizabeth Harrington](#) (Liturgical Officer for the Archdiocese of Brisbane) and [Rev Dr Chris Budden](#) (until recently, Executive Secretary of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church) set the theme for Saturday with their presentations on the report of a dialogue between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Roman Catholic Church published as [Interchurch Marriage – Their Ecumenical Significance and Challenge for Our Churches](#). The report was published in 2001, adopted by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and by the Australian Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

These presentations were followed by an open facilitated forum entitled *Sharing our dreams: Celebrating Interchurch Marriages*. Emphasis was on the contribution made by families towards Christian Unity as well as the positive results possible from documents such as this

*Celebrating Interchurch Marriages* continued with further amplification by Anglican, Roman Catholic, Uniting, Lutheran and Presbyterian clergy.. Of special import were proposals from Chapter 7 from the UCA/RC Document and whether other Churches might adopt this or a similar report.

Couples from Canada, England, New Zealand, Queensland, and Newcastle presented their experience of *Celebrating Interchurch Marriages*. They dialogued with each other about their first meeting, decisions to marry, failures and successes in areas of family life such as Weddings, Baptisms, First Communion, Confirmation and Funerals. Some sad and happy experiences ensued, a mixture of tears and laughter, as the audience empathised with many of the situations expressed.

Saturday sessions concluded with a power point photo presentation of events so far- an excellent way to draw proceedings to a close. After a Roman Catholic Vigil Mass at sunset, where an Anglican priest was the homilist, the final dinner was an occasion for expressions of thanks to participants. Sunday has been outlined above in the dot points. Monday morning breakfast provided, for those still present, a moving farewell at an extended breakfast table.

The post conference reports of

- the facilitator, [Vivienne Llewellyn](#),
- [Ruth Reardon](#) to the Annual Swanwick meeting of the English AIF, from
- [David and Susan White](#) in the Anglican West Australian publication *Messenger* and from
- [Tracey Edstein](#) editor of the Maitland-Newcastle Diocesan Paper *Aurora*

may also be of added interest.

We thank God for the wisdom and presence of the Spirit throughout the Conference from which many special memories and friendships have been taken away. May these memories and friendships, containing as they do strong signs of how Christian Unity might be, long remain.

*Bev Hincks*

*Belmont*

*15.09.2005*