

CREATIVE MINISTRIES NETWORK CONGREGATION COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

**On the 34th Anniversary of the founding of our Network,
the 14th anniversary of the establishment of Creative Ministries Network, and
the 6th anniversary of the formation of CMN Congregation.**

Introduction

We are delighted to present this annual report to you as an account of our Congregation's activities during 2017.

Office-bearers

The Congregation Council's annual meeting was held in February, and the following office-bearers were appointed for 2017: Chairperson - Susan Earl, Deputy Chair - John Bottomley, Secretary - Miranda Walker, Treasurer - John Bottomley and Minute Secretary - Margaret Neith.

Gatherings

There were three gatherings in members' homes on 19th February with eight members present, 21st May with ten present, and 17th September with five attending. The faith reflection theme for May was 'betrayal' and for September the theme was 'grace'.

Contemplative worship services continue to be available by group email for the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month.

We used our Mission to Work Committee's own Lenten study *The Labour of Love* over five sessions for Lent, including an Ash Wednesday service with the first study. Steve Crump and John Bottomley led a study over three sessions in October-November based on Walter Brueggemann's book, *Sabbath as Resistance*. We thank Miranda and Sue for hosting each of these studies in their home.

Retreats

Our two retreats were one-day retreats, held in August and November. The first retreat led by John Bottomley and Sue Earl studied the theme of 'Sin: personal and political', and the second retreat led by Gary Bowman and Steve Crump focused on 'Justice'. Both retreats began with breakfast and concluded with an evening meal. Our faith reflections incorporated personal experience, political and social analysis, and bible study. We are grateful to Philip Moran and Link Health and Community for providing a relaxing and comfortable environment for both retreats.

Congregation Council Meetings

The Congregation met in Council on five occasions, three at house meeting gatherings and twice at retreats. Our average attendance was eight members at the meetings, where the organisation of our worship, studies and service were carried out in a generous spirit of participation and truth-seeking.

Mission activities

Solidarity with post-war Sri Lanka

Margaret Neith was appointed Coordinator of the Congregation's liaison with the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) and reported regularly at our Council meetings. We were delighted to receive Marg's report on a successful English Language professional development program for Jaffna and Uduvil Girls' colleges that was funded through our donation to the Diocese.

We congratulated Margaret for her dedicated work in shipping 27 tea-chests and two boxes to Jaffna. Nine tea-chests of children's books went to each of Jaffna College and Uduvil College, and a further nine tea-chests contained teachers' aides and educational games for the Colleges, and children's toys and educational games for the Day Care Centres run by the Centre for Holistic Healing (CHH). A substantial donation of resources came from Nazareth Christian College in Noble Park.

The Secretary sent a greeting from the congregation to Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah with John Bottomley and Marg Neith when they visited Sri Lanka in July. During this visit Marg filmed an interview with Dr. Thaya Thiagarajah, the Director of CHH. On her return Marg edited the interview with generous help from John Bye, and launched her documentary, 'People Need Healing' in December as part of a fund-raising evening for CHH. The documentary is the first DVD produced by the Congregation to tell the story of our mission support program.

Mission to Work Committee

Committee meetings provided opportunities for members to focus on the place of faith in workplace conversations on mental health. The Committee appointed Steve Crump Convener and John Bottomley Coordinator for 2017.

The Committee launched its Lenten study *Labour of Love* at Springvale UC and mailed 22 hard copies with an accompanying emailed PDF to congregations around Australia for photocopying. A number of evaluations of the study were received from group leaders and participants.

The Committee revised the study based on the evaluations and feedback from the publisher Coventry Press, and a new study *At Work with John's Gospel: a spirituality for life's fruitfulness in all our labours* will be published in 2018. John Bottomley is acknowledged as editor and the Committee members as contributors. The Committee has assigned royalties from sales to the Congregation.

A Lenten sermon competition solicited sermons for the Sundays of Lent, with the prize of \$500 and books to the value of \$100 from Morning Star Publishing awarded to Rev. Duncan Reid, with an 'honourable mention' to former NSW UCA Moderator, Rev. Dr. William Ives. The Congregation Council endorsed guidelines for the sermon competition. Committee members Steve Crump, Keir Saltmarsh and Michael Bastin judged the Lenten sermon. Three sermons from the competition were published on our website.

Work has commenced on a proposal for a companioning peer support ministry course. A draft Expression of Interest has been submitted to the UCA Theological College, 'Pilgrim'. The proposal is based on the CMN agency's model of support for families bereaved by a work-related death and the support program for veterans and families. If successful, it is hoped the course will be accredited through the University of Divinity at the Diploma level.

Webpage

The Congregation's webpage address is: <http://creative.unitingchurch.org.au> . The site was operating from middle of the year, and is gradually developing information and opportunities for others interested in the Congregation's ministry and mission.

UCA Relations

The Congregation Council agreed that the MOU between the Presbytery of Port Phillip East and the former CMN Board no longer was relevant to the new situation after the establishment of Uniting, and the Congregation would need to make its own arrangements for keeping financial records and access to UCA property if and when needed.

Eight members of the Congregation met with three representatives of the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee in November for our first life and witness consultation. The Congregation Council expressed its gratitude for the opportunity to share with the Presbytery representatives on a range of matters.

The Congregation adopted an amended 'statement of commitment to keeping children safe in a holistic environment of safety for all.' Gary Bowman was appointed to the position of Culture Safety Contact Person.

Finances

Having established its first accounts in 2015 after the agency was amalgamated into Uniting, the Congregation completed our first full year of calendar year accounts for 2016 and had them presented and audited in 2017. We also tabled our first budget in 2017 for the calendar year.

A Bank account was opened at the Commonwealth Bank to facilitate international funds transfers to JDCSI. The Congregation appointed Linda Hoskins to be a fourth signatory on the two CMN Congregation UCA Funds accounts.

We appointed Sanjeev (Jeev) Rajathevan to be our volunteer accountant.

The CMN Congregation Peace Fund was supported by two direct debit donor in 2017, an increase of one.

A first payment of \$20,000 and then a further payment of \$30,000 were approved to JDCSI. The second amount was forwarded to the Union Bank of Sri Lanka "JDCSI/Australian Partnership" account in the name of the Diocese. The Diocese approved a condition, agreed by the Union Bank also, that Margaret Neith must give consent for any capital to be released from the account for the Diocese to access funds donated by the CMN Congregation. Margaret's consent for the release of capital funds requires the Congregation's approval of the withdrawal. Interest on this account is to be transferred to JDCSI at the expiry of the term of the deposit. A second payment of \$30,000 was approved for transfer from the Peace Fund Account at the earliest date in 2018 to benefit JDCSI by making interest available earlier. Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah was unable to provide a progress report on Diocesan expenditure from the first grant, as the Diocesan Treasurer was on three months leave at the end of 2017. A report will be provided in 2018 at the first opportunity.

Thanksgiving

The Congregation offered its congratulations to Sue Earl on her prize-winning film 'Deep Storage' at a film festival in Bentenville, North West Arkansas. The prize was for the audience choice award.

We rejoice in all the ways God's Spirit has been with us in our personal and corporate life in 2017. We are grateful to our members who contribute so much of their faith and wisdom to our gatherings and the relationships which have developed through our shared journey. We look to the future in hope for the new possibilities that greet us. We pray that by God's grace, we will continue to be formed as a Congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Chairperson: Sue Earl
Deputy Chair and Treasurer: John Bottomley
Secretary: Miranda Walker
Minute Secretary: Margaret Neith