

CREATIVE MINISTRIES NETWORK CONGREGATION COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020

9th anniversary of the formation of CMN Congregation
17th anniversary of the establishment of Creative Ministries Network
37th Anniversary of the founding of our Network

Introduction

This annual report presents an account of the Creative Ministries Network Congregation's activities during 2020.

In memorium

During 2020 we remembered four people who died in 2020 who were parents of Network members, Miranda Walker, Lisa Jacobson, Gary Bowman and Linda Hoskins. We pray that our loved-ones are at peace in God's eternal care. Our members remembered all those who have gone before us in a service of remembrance in November.

Office-bearers

At the Congregation Council's annual meeting in February, the following office-bearers were appointed for 2020: Chairperson – Linda Hoskins, Deputy Chair - Susan Earl, Secretary - Miranda Walker, Treasurer - John Bottomley, and Minute Secretary - Margaret Neith.

The following were appointed to lead the Congregation's program activities. Margaret Neith is coordinator of our Sri Lanka Support program, Mission to Work convenor is Steve Crump and coordinator is John Bottomley and Gary Bowman is Safe Church coordinator. John Bottomley is the Congregation's Program (Gatherings) coordinator:

Gatherings

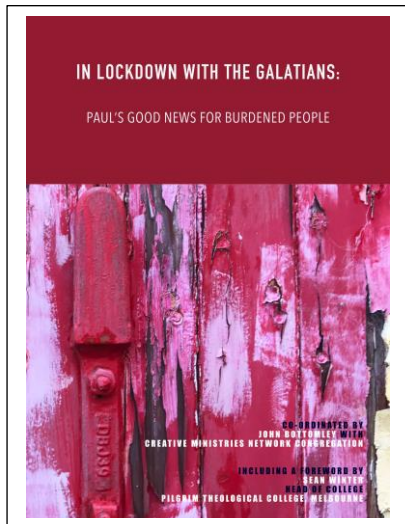


We cut short our Lenten Study on 'At work with John's Gospel' as the devastating impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 overwhelmed and halted traditional ways of gathering. Sue Earl helped us organise to meet with Zoom, and we began a series of five studies on how the pandemic was impacting our lives, the nation and our world. We introduced a second gathering each month on a week night to strengthen our support for one another, and shared our experiences of this 'unprecedented' crisis over five themes:

- What does it mean, this devastation and chaos?
- Care in a crisis
- Justice for a time of crisis
- Religious hypocrisy - its negative impact on Christian faith and society
- Environment, ecology, nature.

We rejoiced that over the course of our gatherings, our truth-telling about our initial feelings of fear and confusion within the context of our faith-sharing helped to transform the buried energy of our painful feelings into new creativity and commitment. We were moved to publish an online booklet ([PandemicStudies-final.pdf \(unitingchurch.org.au\)](#)) as the fruit of our truth-telling, *COVID19: an unprecedented crisis? Creating a Safe Space for Faith, Reflection and Hope for Small Groups and Congregations*.

We cancelled our annual retreat in favour of one of the pandemic studies. Our review of the pandemic series sharpened members' belief our gathering was taking on a distinctive value, which may be attractive to others. Linda, Sue and John prepared a gathering to explore the possibility of telling our story so others may know that there are alternative, valuable and enriching ways of practicing Christianity. The Council meeting agreed our story could introduce how our gatherings offer 'a profoundly healthy environment where one is heard properly. We give each other room and consideration. It is a safe and open place where our true selves can turn up and be welcomed and embraced. We would like to share this idea with others because it has been so important to us as a viable alternative to attending a more traditional church service.'



Our plans to recommence home gatherings in July were set aside by a further lockdown. The congregation quickly agreed to pursue a second series of pandemic studies, and again members volunteered to work with the program coordinator to develop each session. The themes we agreed on suggested Paul's letter to the Galatians may be a fruitful scriptural foundation for a series exploring our current context of being held captive by the unseen power of COVID-19, so we proceeded under the heading, 'In lockdown with the Galatians', also on Zoom.

Themes for the series were:

- Power and (white) privilege.
- Powerlessness and agency: what does it mean to be human when you are powerless?
- Prayer as agency: can prayer restore your humanity in times of suffering?
- Pandemic: power, powerlessness and prayer.

Our congregation also decided to publish this study because our prayerful discussions became for us the horizon of God's promised grace and peace for our lives. The Synod Moderator, Rev Denise Liersch agreed to a Zoom launch of our study, generously hosted by the Presbytery Zoom Café. The Synod agreed to make the study available on their website: [PANDEMIC-STUDY-2-GALATIANS.pdf](#)

Three gatherings concluded the year on the theme of meditation, prayer and the interior life, with each session led by a member sharing their personal spiritual practice, followed by a conversation and reflection on our interior life.

Material for Contemplative Worship in the Ignatian tradition was provided by email on the 2nd and 4th Sunday each month. In addition, two small groups using this material met in homes in Ormond and Reservoir.

Congregation Council Meetings

We held four Congregation Council meetings for the year, and our eighth annual meeting, which adopted the Congregation's program report and financial reports for 2019. Office-bearers and leaders for the year ahead were elected, the auditor reappointed, and the budget for 2020 adopted.

The Council adopted a granting policy for the recently re-established Creative Ministries Arts Fund, establishing priorities for:

- a) Indigenous arts projects.
- b) CMNC members' arts projects.
- c) CMNC mission areas (Justice@ Work, Sri Lanka Partnership)
- d) Arts projects consistent with the objectives of the CM Arts Fund Trust Deed.

The Congregation approved providing DGR receipts for fund-raising activities for the Arts Fund, and agreed money donated at the quarterly Eucharist will be DGR receipted and allocated to Indigenous arts projects recommended by the Congregation.

Council completed our annual review of external control standards required by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission related to compliance for donations, and several clauses were updated as proposed.

Finances

The Council is pleased to report that all of our compliance responsibilities for the year have been met, including:

- The audit of 2019 financial reports was completed and forwarded to the Presbytery.
- The Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission 2019 report was completed.
- The Congregation made its annual contribution to the Synod Mission and Service Fund.

The Council was pleased with our first year administering the Creative Ministries Arts Fund under the governance of the Synod Property Trust.

Healing, justice and reconciliation activities

Indigenous Arts project

Through the Creative Ministries Arts Fund, Council granted \$1,750 to Shauntai Batzke for her professional development funding submissions to support her opera project on her father's life story.

Solidarity with post-war Sri Lanka

Margaret Neith continued as Coordinator of the Congregation's liaison with the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI) and reported regularly at our Council meetings. Features of her reports included:

- Progress reports on Fiona Blair's work in Jaffna while living in at Uduvil Girls College until the pandemic forced Fiona to return to Australia.
- Two members continued to provide financial support for an orphaned Jaffna College student.

- Funds were provided to the Centre for Holistic Healing (CHH) to provide food support during the pandemic lockdown in the Northern Province.
- Three tea-chest sized boxes were shipped to Colombo, one for CHH and two with picture books for the Jaffna College primary school.
- John edited the collection of Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah's charges to the bi-annual meeting of his Diocesan Council. The book was published by the Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.
- Liaison with Fiona Blair to complete her report on her visit, incorporating very positive reports from both school Principals, and submitting them to the UCA Synod.
- Liaison with Dr. Thaya Thiagarajah to produce a report on the work of CHH.

Justice@Work

Council agreed to rename the Mission to Work committee, Justice@Work. The group meets monthly for mutual support.

Council agreed to establish a 'Members Work' page on the Congregation's website for members to promote their work. <http://creative.unitingchurch.org.au/members-work>

Gratitude

We are grateful for the many ways God's Spirit was with us in 2020, especially responding to the challenges of the global pandemic. We were both surprised and grateful that our relationships of solidarity and mutual regard continued to grow through our shared journey through Zoom in a world that has the capacity to bring us undone through its violence, suffering and injustice.

We pray that God's justice and mercy will continue to guide and lead us as we seek to live out our vocation to hold honest conversations that help us to face the challenges of our lives, focus on what God calls each of us to be, and how we may serve the common good.

Chairperson: Linda Hoskins

Deputy Chair: Sue Earl

Treasurer: John Bottomley

Secretary: Miranda Walker

Minute Secretary: Margaret Neith