



Conference of Churches
in Aotearoa-New Zealand

PROGRAMME ON RACISM

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A FIRST RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER ON CCANZ PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT, FOR Executive, November 1992

- Mitzi Nairn

New Zealand is the only place in the world trying to put in place what we are doing. We're going where no one else has been, and that's the challenge.
- Kara Puketapu

While Mr Puketapu was speaking to a conference on the Treaty's commercial implications, organised by the Institute for International research, I find his words ring true for CCANZ, generally and in terms of its relationship with Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga i Nga Hahi.

Therefore my first and strongest response, as director of the Programme On Racism, and as a person of ecumenical concerns, who has been part of the transition from NCC to CCANZ and involved in the first few years of the life of the Conference, is that any structural proposal, as opposed to programmatic development within parameters already set down, requires the most thorough process of consultation.

Thus I consider any change which threatens the joint administration, either in staffing or locality, to be unacceptable.

I find many of the suggested programmatic priorities desirable, but I consider that they can be achieved without a further disrupting restructuring. Centralising the staff and returning to a General Secretary seems to me retrogressive. I should argue that it would be preferable to amend the constitution if any legitimation of the present structure is needed.

KAITOKE

The work of developing a new ecumenical body was hard and long and still continues. However, many of those who were sent to the two sessions at Kaitoke spoke with conviction of having been led by the presence of the Holy Spirit through negotiations which went beyond compromises into unexpected creativity. The goals were generated through an experience of loving Christian community, and reflected a faithfulness to all the conflicting briefing which surprised those who participated, and struck notes of recognition when reported back to

of trust from which to say it, the timing is good for those outlets. Some priority should be given to communication where the conference and church leadership have got out of touch with each other. I doubt that the best way ahead is to change back to what they used to have, which was not an inclusive model, nor very popular with them when they did have it, rather the task is to re-include them in the current reality. It is important to remember that the critique from the excluded and marginalised groups, such as women and youth, has been as much about process and structure as about content. The issue has not been participation in a corrupt model, but participation and transformation - "Behold, I make all things new." New wineskins for new wine.

Programme Priorities

Spelling out and developing current programme priorities will certainly make it easier for CCANZ "to fulfil our role in a clearly defined way which is readily understood". Setting aside restructuring, a period of discussion and clarification will enable the executive to articulate these priorities with the full co-operation of the people whose commitment will carry them out.

About the first, a proposal to firm up our commitment to te tino rangatiratanga, I feel very positive, provided that such a development remains within our partnership with Te Runanga. This would imply a strengthening of the relationship with Te Runanga, in which the conference has begun to affirm te tino rangatiratanga. It means that the BUILDING programme will need shaping to sustain this emphasis.

The development of women's and youth work can be double-edged. The danger is of unintended marginalisation while developing a strong base for the sometimes difficult task of participation. The paper correctly identifies that they are "in a different category from other programme priorities".

The priority of ecumenical life and formation I see as central. In this connection I see the suggestion of alternating general Forums and national workshops year by year to be excellent. (proposal 2) This solves the problem we have identified of each Forum having to include both tasks, to the detriment of both.

Some of the matters raised about the position and role of Christian World Service in terms of world development and justice, and elsewhere in the paper, certainly merit further discussion. I have heard some of those very points canvassed by the present Coordinator, and shall hear feedback from CWS with great interest. It is a pity that timing and process in beginning the discussion through this paper did not include a request that CWS contribute a discussion paper on these matters for this meeting.

In comment on number 7, Theology for Aotearoa, I believe that CCANZ is sitting on a huge wealth of experientially based theological insight which awaits articulation. Conversations with members of theological faculties in which I have participated as Director of the POR

those who had commissioned the people to the task.

The strongest overall message from the churches was that the new body should not be an elite few, but should root ecumenical life at the local level. This is reflected in the goals: communication with churches,, The goal on women's participation to some extent amplify the goal of inclusiveness.

Inclusiveness should mean coverage of the whole country, including more rural centres, and members of local parishes.

Staffing and Structure

The initial appointment of three executive staff in three localities reflected this clear priority of the member churches. When that proved financially impossible to sustain, the restructuring process, which was, incidentally, very consultative with member churches, continued to express the regional priority. Hence the decision to go with the dispersed fieldworkers, at risk of under-resourcing the national office.

Working patterns developed in the first three years reflected both the desirability of dispersed participation and a need to call on people resources given a shortage of money and staff time. Small ecumenical groups up and down the country took on responsibility for conference tasks, preparing study resources, worship services, guidelines for this and that, and furthering the life and work of the conference.

The national office is under-resourced. Things that have suffered have been international ecumenical relations, and the development of a higher profile with member churches through more publications and interpretation of the successes of the new body.

However, international ecumenical relations would have been affected by the changes anyway, with new members of the conference indicating that they would not be happy with a simple continuation of the old NCC based networks. They wished to test the assumptions of those networks, and to contribute some links of their own. Indications are that that process has reached a stage where there is more knowledge and trust, and a desire to increase activity in this area. While it would be nice to be able to devote more staff time to it, there is no reason that the work cannot be developed through delegation to new working groups.

The lack of profile and visibility, especially with some of the leadership of member churches is a worry. Communication of the very exciting developments of the conference was the main casualty of the restructuring process, as two of the executive staff left before they were able to record and reflect on what had been happening - although I suspect that a listing of booklets and papers which have been produced so far would add up to a surprising number, and might in turn raise some questions about problems of circulation.

In any case, the situation is now urgent. Overtures from church media indicate that now the conference has more to say, and a growing base

indicate a willingness to find ways to relate to ecumenical theological developments.

Structure

I didn't set out to write a huge paper, so will try to be brief!

The comments on the role of the Executive. Some of the lines between policy development and programme implementation have been blurred because of the wishes of some executive members to have a hands on involvement. Because of the scarce resources, and because of the ethos of inclusion, this has carried more positive than negative effects. The Executive has also been forced to spend valuable time on survival structuring, which would desirably have gone into policy development. Executive members need to be clearer about the distinction between their collective executive task of developing policy, and their involvement with programme implementation.

The comments on the unit structure are helpful. Provided we take care to collect the babies, by all means biff the bathwater.

Proposal 3

Some such provision for increased participation by church leadership sounds like a good idea, and would speed up some of the problematic communications. It should, however, be pointed out that not all member churches identify "heads" in the way implied, as the negotiations for the 1990 Church Leaders' Statement bear out. A present difficulty seems to be that those "Heads of Churches" who identify themselves as such tend to get together and thus marginalise other denominations - there is, perhaps, a prior task of ecumenical development and learning here. There is an overlap with the question of persons in national administrative positions within the large churches.

A related issue is the balance between responding to hosed off/hostile parts of membership and pleased/friendly sections. It is important to have somewhere where they can front one another, rather than the organisation falling either into an appeasement style or floating off obliviously.

b) regular Presidential Consultations with church leadership, however identified, sounds excellent.

I am of the opinion that we should remember that this paper was commissioned to initiate discussion. This it will certainly do. I hope that the Executive will have sufficient collective memory to be cautious about making major decisions about change within a meeting, without due outward consultation and deliberation, so I favour the suggestion that the process should continue over at least till the April meeting.