

# To be Methodist is to be Ecumenical

## **Introduction**

Conference 2002 asked the Mission and Ecumenical Committee (MM&E) to make a policy statement on the church's position on ecumenism and how this relates to the Methodist Church's current relationship with the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand. A working group was formed to begin the task, This group saw the need for a wide ranging statement that captured the significance of the ecumenical movement over time to the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa. This statement is about ecumenism in its widest sense, and not church union or bilateral dialogues, although reference is made to these as aspects of ecumenism expression.

## **What is ecumenism?**

Ecumenism acknowledges division in the Christian Church and seeks a restoration of unity based on the principle of the oneness of the people of God. But ecumenism has meant different things for different churches. The Roman Catholic Church uses the term for the various efforts to promote the unity of the church. The Orthodox churches tend to focus on a recovery of the apostolic tradition as a basis for coming together. Protestant Churches variously use the term ecumenism for relationships with distant churches; the coming and being together of local churches; and concern for a world community where justice and peace will prevail. Evangelicals often advocate a confessing ecumenism which gathers together "true believers" from among the churches. The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in 1951 offered a useful understanding. It stated that the term ecumenism should be used "to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the gospel to the whole world. It therefore covers ? both unity and mission in the context of the whole world." Konrad Raiser (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches) offers a similar comprehensive understanding of ecumenism. He says, "Churchly and worldly, spiritual and missionary-social dimensions belong together in a comprehensive understanding of ecumenism. ? Ecumenism is a relational, dynamic concept which extends beyond the fellowship of Christians and churches to the human community within the whole of creation." Ecumenism now 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.

## **Towards a theology of ecumenism**

### ***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 spoke 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) and 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 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. 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 faith, hope and love. The church keeps alive the disturbing memory of Jesus. 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 saw Christians, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, become aware of the scandal of division, bigotry and isolation. Through 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 self-sufficiency is alien to the gospel. A new humility has been born among us that rejects the spirit of triumphalism. We embrace the insight that each ecclesial tradition though valid is partial. We have gifts to offer the wider church and we are enriched through our willingness to receive. The ecumenical spirit nurtures a catholicity in which we come to know each other, respect each other and cherish each other. We believe that 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. But we read the same Scriptures and recognise our common baptism. We long to gather around the same table. We have reached the point in our ecumenical journey where we know that "we are not out of communion but share an existing though imperfect communion." 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. In the Eucharist we express gratitude and offer the life of the world to God to be renewed and transformed.

## What does ecumenism call for?

One of the current Co-moderators of the World Council of Churches, Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic Church, has offered some useful insights. He offers five learnings arising from his own experience of ecumenism:

- Ecumenism calls us to *openness to the other* by moving out of our own isolated circles.
- Ecumenism calls us into a *living encounter and dialogue* with people of other traditions, to our mutual enrichment.
- Ecumenism is a *learning process* that leads to better understandings of each other.
- Ecumenism is *mutual challenging*, a growing together through critical engagement.
- Ecumenism is a *pilgrimage towards unity* – the *raison d’etre* of the ecumenical movement.

Aram I sums it up by saying, “Ecumenism implies both hopes and risks, sacrifices and full engagement. This is the ecumenical way. ? Once you are part of the ecumenical movement, it becomes part of you.”

## Forms of ecumenical contact

Mostly the ecumenical focus has been on unity, chiefly the unity of the church, although in recent years it has extended to inter-religious dialogue. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries ecumenical contacts have been along the following lines.

- Efforts to bring Christians and churches together at the international level, culminating in the formation of the World Council of Churches.
- The formation of regional ecumenical bodies such as the East Asia Christian Council/Christian Conference of Asia.
- The emergence of national ecumenical bodies such as the National Council of Churches/Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Church union movements such as that initiated in New Zealand in 1950 with the forming of the Joint Standing Committee on Church Union.
- Ecumenical chaplaincies in hospitals, schools, tertiary institutions, prisons, the workplace, etc.
- Combined churches social service ventures at the local level, and the New Zealand Council of Social Services at the national level.
- Local initiatives such as religious instruction in schools, ministers associations, councils of churches.
- Ecumenical educational and training initiatives such as the Churches Education Commission, Youth Ministries Association, Ecumenical Institute of Distance theological Studies, Trinity/St John’s Theological Colleges.
- A combined churches approach to wider national and international issues, through agencies such as Christian World Service (overseas aid and development), the Churches Agency on Social Issues (public questions) and the Churches Agency on International Issues
- Bilateral dialogues such as those between the Methodist and the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in New Zealand.
- Interfaith dialogues such as those that have led to the formation of a Council of Christians and Jews, and a Council of Christians and Muslims in New Zealand.

These forms of contact are only intended to illustrate the range of ecumenical activity in which churches are engaged in. It should not be seen as a definitive list.

## Cooperative ventures

The first Co-operative Venture (CV) formed in New Zealand was the Raglan Union (1943). It brought together Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian congregations. Over the next ten years four more Union Parishes were established. (Taita & Corstorphine 1947, Marchwiell 1952, Wainuiomata 1953).

The five initial Union Parishes illustrate two of the compelling reasons why C.V's are formed. One, they ensure that the presence of the church remains in rural communities. Two, they establish the church in new housing areas, where the resources of individual denominations are insufficient to purchase land, build churches, halls and parsonages, and there is not a sufficiently strong 'people base' to sustain separate congregational life. In the years that followed these pioneering Union Parishes, other Co-operative Ventures were formed. Some reflected the factors mentioned above, others were formed not because of expediency, but by the desire to give expression to the theological conviction that visible unity is an expression of the Gospel. Some of the C.V's that were established in the late 1960's and the early 1970's, did so because they believed in the imminent possibility of organic Church Union between the Five Negotiating Churches. They wished to anticipate locally, what they believed was going to happen nationally!

Currently there are some 196 Methodist Parishes in New Zealand. Of these 116 (59%) are Co-operative Ventures involving a partnership with one or more of the other 'partner' churches - Presbyterian, Anglican, Associated Churches of Christ, Congregational. Co-operative Ventures contribute to ecumenism in a variety of ways:

- C.V's are the visible evidence that ecumenism can work at the primary level of the life of the Church, the worshipping congregation. They have to cope with far more ecclesiastical bureaucracy than denominational parishes do. The fact that C.V's continue to exist is a tribute to their determination to rise above the divisions of denominationalism.
- C.V's break down the mystic of denominational integrity and the 'glamour' of ecumenical unity. The shortcomings of denominational rules and regulations are quickly exposed when C.V's strike difficulties and the journey towards unity is revealed for what it is in part, a costly and frustrating experience.
- C.V's are living proof that differences in theology and practice are not insurmountable. They provide an invaluable context where the unity and diversity of the church are constantly tested. Their existence is a constant reminder to their partner churches that the agenda of ecumenical co-operation will not go away!
- C.V's in New Zealand are a sobering reminder of the failure of the five 'Negotiating Churches' to achieve organic union. But that very failure highlights another important truth. Ecumenism is not an end, but a journey!

## Tensions in ecumenism

There are several tensions we often have to deal with in the course of our engaging with the ecumenical movement.

**Local versus global involvement.** It is easy to see the ecumenical movement as being removed from the grass roots and the local church members. Comparatively few can travel to participate in ecumenical gatherings at international, regional and sometimes even at the national level. So it would be tempting simply to engage in ecumenism at the local level. But to do that would be to cut ourselves

off from something significant. While it is important to be involved ecumenically at the local level, it is just as important to be open to what we can learn from ecumenism at other levels. In these days when global forces constantly impact on the local scene we need to engage ecumenically at both the local and international levels if we are to further the mission of the church and create a more just, peaceful and loving world.

**Asia versus Pacific regional involvement.** For some people there is a tension as to whether we identify with Asia or the Pacific when we engage ecumenically at the regional and international levels. The Methodist Church of New Zealand (MCNZ) has been a member of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) since it was invited to join at the time of its inception. It has been active in both contributing to and benefiting from the life of that body. The MCNZ is not a member of the Pacific Conference of Churches. It has not been invited to join, nor has it sought to join on the basis that we are identified in the eyes of the Pacific as a nation that has had a colonial influence in the Pacific which at times has sought to exercise a large power influence in the region. As Methodists we have preferred that the churches of the Pacific Island nations work together ecumenically without our agenda as a church from another context having to be reckoned with by them. Yet we can still stand in solidarity with Pacific churches and their concerns without being involved in their ecumenical structures. Also being a member of CCA does not preclude MCNZ members of Pacific Island origin from being involved in the life of CCA. Currently Fuailalagi Samoa Saleupolu serves on the General committee of CCA. Several others have attended and contributed CCA ecumenical formation events.

**Methodism versus ecumenism.** There is often a tension between being Methodist and being ecumenical. Sometimes our membership in the WCC is played off against our membership of the World Methodist Council (WMC). On several occasions the Methodist Conference has given the WCC and the CCA a higher priority than the WMC. But this need not be seen as downgrading our loyalty to our Methodist tradition. We need not put the two in opposition to each other. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation are strong bodies which work cooperatively with the WCC and have located their headquarters in Geneva alongside the WCC. The WMC seeks to do the same by having a secretary based in Geneva in the WCC headquarters building. The WCC is always seeking build close relationships with the various Christian World Communions. So we do not need to play Methodism off against ecumenism as each has its role and contributes to the life of the other. Then as this paper argues, to be Methodist is to be ecumenical.

We should not see the local and the global, Asia and the Pacific, Methodism and ecumenism, as opposites in constant tension with each other. In each case we benefit from both.

### **Our Methodist heritage is ecumenical**

Being ecumenical is an essential part of our Methodist heritage. Theodore Runyan in his book “The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology for Today” says that, “John Wesley emerges from the eighteenth century as a surprisingly ecumenical figure. He was the offspring not just of one church and one tradition, but was influenced by no fewer than five heritages.”

John’s forebears on both his father’s and mother’s sides were Puritans. While his parents both (independently) left Puritanism to become Anglicans, they continued to hold onto Puritan piety with Puritan writings of the day being read at family devotions. When Wesley published his “Christian Library” for the use of lay preachers, more than half the writers he included were Puritans. Wesley

himself was an Anglican who described himself as a high churchman. His loyalty to the Anglican Church remained strong throughout his life. He had no intention of forming a separate church, instead seeing Methodism as a lay renewal movement within the Anglican Church. Wesley also drew from the Lutheran tradition he encountered through the Moravians. It was the Moravians who convinced him of the centrality of justification by faith alone. His heart-warming experience of May 1738 probably took place at a Moravian sponsored meeting in Aldersgate Street, London. As a young person Wesley was exposed to the writings of the Roman Catholic mystics as his parents included their writings in family devotions too. As a man Wesley continued to value this tradition, including some of the writings of these mystics in his “Christian Library”. It was Wesley’s reading of Thomas a Kempis’ “Imitation of Christ” that led to his development of the doctrine of ‘Christian perfection’. Finally Wesley spent time studying the writings of the fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church. From their writings he came to see that human beings become partners in God’s own enterprise of renewing a fallen creation. So sanctification had to be placed within the larger context of cosmic renewal as the Eastern Fathers acclaimed.

Wesley’s ability to accept and draw on these various traditions is reflected in his sermon on “The Catholic Spirit”. Here he states: “Every wise man, will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions, than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love that single question, ‘Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’ I dare not therefore, presume to impose my mode of worship on any other. I believe it is truly primitive and apostolical; but my belief is no rule for another. I ask not therefore, of him with whom I would unite in love, Are you of my church, of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of church government and allow the same church officers with me? Do you join in the form of prayer wherein I worship God? I enquire not, Do you receive the supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner that I do? Nor whether in the administration of baptism, you agree with me in admitting sureties for the baptized; in the manner of administering it; or the age of those to whom it should be administered. Nay, I ask not of you, whether you allow baptism and the Lord’s supper at all. Let all these things stand by. We will talk of them if need be, at a more convenient season. My only question is this, ‘Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’ Runyon sums the matter up by stating, “Wesley would seem to demonstrate that the richness of the Christian gospel cannot be exhausted by any one denominational tradition, but we appropriate this variegated richness as we share in the resources ecumenism makes available to us.”

It should then come as no surprise then that Methodists have been active in the ecumenical movement that emerged in the twentieth century. Amongst notable Methodists who have contributed significantly to this movement would be: John R Mott (USA) who was active in the formation of the World Student Christian Federation, the International Missionary Council, and the World Council of Churches; Philip Potter (West Indies) and Emilio Castro (Uruguay) who provided significant leadership as General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches; D T Niles (Sri Lanka) who served with the World Student Christian Federation, the Young Men’s Christian Association, and later as General Secretary of the East Asia Conference of Churches; and in our own country, J J Lewis, Ashleigh Petch, Ruawai D Rakena and Phyllis Guthardt who played significant roles in the development of ecumenism both locally and internationally.

Our roots as a church are both Wesleyan and ecumenical. Yet we live at a time when there is less interest in ecumenism. A renewed sense of denominationalism is abroad. In this setting we do well to heed the words of William Slane Coffin, a churchman in the USA, who says we need “to seek a unity that ? recognizes the need for roots, while insisting that the point of roots is to put forth branches.” Branches reach out to touch others as with trees in the bush, or they shelter or support other forms of life. So it will never be enough just to nurture and treasure our roots as Methodists. We must, if we are to be true to our origins, reach out to churches and people of other traditions through the ecumenical movement, as we seek the unity for which Jesus prayed, a unity not just for the sake of the churches, but for God’s world and a renewed creation.

### **The Aotearoa New Zealand challenge**

Ecumenism to be effective has to be contextual. Just as Methodism in this country is not the same as in Britain or elsewhere in the world, so the shape of ecumenism will not be uniform around the world. Our Aotearoa New Zealand context must influence the shape of ecumenism in this land.

One of the learnings we can bring to our ecumenical involvements comes from our Methodist bicultural journey and our grappling with the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi in our church life. This has contributed to the bicultural goal of the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ). It has contributed to the recognition of two national ecumenical bodies in this country, CCANZ and Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi o Aotearoa. Both have an associate relationship with the WCC.

Maori in the churches have been ecumenical for many years. The Maori Section of the National Council of Churches (NCC) was formed in 1947, six years after the NCC came into existence. Methodist members were active in the Maori Section from the outset. For many years members of the Maori Section referred to the NCC as the parent body. In the late 1970s they decided to exercise the tino rangatiratanga (power and authority) guaranteed them in the Treaty of Waitangi and move out from being under the NCC to establish an autonomous ecumenical body. In 1982 Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi came into being. From the outset the Maori response to ecumenism has focused on seeing society through Maori eyes, and has embraced cultural, economic, and political, as well as the religious and spiritual spheres of life.

While this bicultural journey is a source of concern to some in the MCNZ, it need not be played off against relationships with people of other ethnic groups in the life of our’s or other churches. The Treaty of Waitangi is for the benefit of us all, wherever we come from and belong now. Indeed the Treaty of Waitangi is a surprisingly ecumenical treaty. Not only did four faith traditions play a key role in the signing of the treaty (Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic and traditional Maori); a fourth article agreed to verbally by those present and recorded by an observer, William Colenso, (though not written into the wording of the treaty at that late stage) gave freedom of religious expression to those four particular traditions. Today the fourth article could be taken to include the right of all faiths, Christian and other, to exist in this country. This, more than a hundred years before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If the treaty gave us freedom of religion in Aotearoa New Zealand, it behoves us to take that treaty seriously and to act ecumenically as we seek to address the key issues facing our society and nation today.

Sometimes we benefit from seeing ourselves as an outsider sees us. Professor Jane Kelsey of the University of Auckland did that for Methodists at their annual conference in 1999. She pointed out that by and large the churches were now marginal to the discussion on national and world issues and the emerging debates about alternatives. Institutional survival, she said, had become the priority, with a downgrading of commitment to social justice and treaty issues. In the face of all the pressing social, economic and political issues that face us, Jane Kelsey said we have adopted a defeatist stance, but if we want to, we can make an impact by organising and adopting sophisticated strategies for engaging with the issues.

Our context in Aotearoa New Zealand raises a number of challenges we as a Methodist Church can bring to the ecumenical scene here both locally and globally, at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **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 that can lead to 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 less of these ecumenical spaces at this time.

### **Reconfiguring the ecumenical movement**

Is the ecumenical movement suffering from institutionalism? Can it be a dynamic movement for mission in the world? There is always a danger that ecumenism becomes institutionalized. It's true role however is to be a living body responding to new challenges brought about by changing times and an ongoing discernment of the ecumenical calling.

The majority of the churches embrace "churchly ecumenism", the search for the visible unity of the Christian church. Yet reality often suggests something different. For churches seem now to be more concerned with maintaining and defending their own identities and integrity, rather than strengthening unity and fellowship between churches. This must be challenged so that ecumenism and denominationalism are held together in creative tension. Neither should the ecumenical goal be seen solely in terms of the visible unity of the church. It must also include engaging together for common witness and service, for justice and peace, and for the integrity of creation.



Konrad Raiser says, “The time has come to recognize that the ecumenical movement and the ecumenical agenda have outgrown the institutionalised churches. In fact, the ecumenical movement is too precious to be left to the churches and their leaders alone! The ecumenical movement is an affair of the whole people of God and it must regain its original vocation of being a renewal movement of and in the churches.”

Raiser goes on to reflect on a new configuration for ecumenism. It should be the objective of a new ecumenical configuration to so interlink the different levels of conciliar ecumenism, that a genuine sense of fellowship emerges between the churches from the local to the global level. Their structures of governance must be simplified and interlinked. He goes on to suggest that that what might be emerging is a configuration of interlinking circles representing the three classical foci of the ecumenical mandate: unity, mission, and justice/service. The issue then becomes one of how these different circles can be so inter-related that a more coherent, dynamic and responsive configuration of the ecumenical movement can emerge.

### **Methodism and Ecumenism – A way ahead**

During the last decade The Methodist Church of New Zealand, Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa, has experienced sharp conflict. So deep has the discord been that the Church has experienced schism. Three groups have broken away: one to form a network of Grace Fellowships, a second to form The Wesleyan Methodist Church and a third to form The Samoan Evangelical Wesleyan Methodist Church. It is likely that in the next decade the Church will need to give as much attention to questions related to internal unity as to relations with other churches.

With its origins as a renewal movement within the Church of England, Methodism has been torn between loyalty to its heritage in that historic church and its impulse to be an evangelistic movement proclaiming the gospel. Methodism has always seen itself as part of a greater whole. In our history, concern for unity has seldom been absent.

Through ecumenical encounter we have come to cherish our roots and our distinctive way of being church. Participation in ecumenical bodies and dialogue with sister communions has immensely enriched the life of our Church. We have not yet received all that is offered. Nor have we exhausted what we have to give from our tradition.

We believe that the unity of the church is not incidental to God's purpose. The unity of the church demonstrates God's ability to reconcile through Christ and supports the mission of God. The unity of the church serves the unity of creation. We understand visible unity to involve mutual acceptance of faith, sacramental life and ministry, a common witness to the gospel, solidarity with the oppressed and the defence of creation.

Aware of our fragmentation, lack of understanding of each other and the prayer of Christ that we be one:

- We recognize our need of God's grace, of prayer and healing
- We confess our failure to love our sisters and brothers in Christ
- We repent our lack of appreciation of other cultures
- We acknowledge our limited experience and vision.

In our ecumenical journey there can be no turning back. As New Zealand Methodists we renew our commitment to ecumenism.

- We express our willingness to witness with partner churches to justice and peace through ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi; and our world confessional body, the World Methodist Council.
- We confirm our readiness to continue bilateral dialogues with the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church
- We reaffirm our openness to exploring new ecumenical configurations and models of the visible unity of the church in this land that embrace unity, mission, service, justice and the integrity of creation, while at the same time honouring spiritual and cultural identities.
- We declare our resolve to reform our common life and structures to allow sister communions to see more clearly the apostolic faith and mission among us.

August 2003