

Record of meeting of the Australian Council of Churches'
Committee to investigate Women's Work with representatives
of the N.S.W. Women's Inter-Church Council, Thursday,
October 4, 1962 at 10.30am at 511 Kent Street, Sydney.

PRESENT: Mrs. M. Wyllie (convener), Mrs. F. Mackay, Deaconess Andrews, Mrs. L.M. Williams, Mrs. J.F. Dey.
Mrs. D.J.A. Verco, Mrs. Farr and Mrs. Brig. Baker, representing the NSW Inter-Church Council Executive.
The Revs. D.M. Taylor and H. L. Perkins (ACC staff).

APOLOGY: Apology was received from the Rev. B. H. Parker.

PRAYERS: Prayers were led, after morning tea, by the Rev. H. L. Perkins.

BUSINESS:

1. Mrs. Wyllie spoke of how the ACC Committee and the NSW Women's Inter-Church Council Executive had become aware that they were both seeking development in women's work along overlapping lines, and had therefore decided to consult with each other. Hence, this meeting took place.

2. Mrs. Verco, speaking on behalf of the NSW Women's Inter-Church Council, said that her Council had resolved to write to the Women's Inter-Church Councils in other States to discuss closer relationships, but had delayed acting on its resolutions until this consultation took place. The NSW Women's Inter-Church Council had two things in mind:

1. the need for a loose national women's organization which did not dominate existing inter-church councils, but related them to each other.
2. the need for inter-church women's work to develop in local areas.

3. Mrs. Wyllie, speaking on behalf of the ACC Committee on Women's Work, said that her Committee shared these two concerns, but would add to them the following:

1. the two concerns for national and local development are not alternative courses of action. The ACC Committee had considered them in terms of "one or the other" and had come to the conclusion that local development needed the stimulation of national development. Hence the two developments must take place together.
2. In developing a national organization, it is important to include the Federal denominational women's organizations which are becoming increasingly important in helping programme development in local denominational groups.
3. A national organization works to stimulate women's work at every level in Australia, but it is also important in order to provide a link with, and receive help from, organizations of similar kind overseas, such as the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society in the WCC, and the Committee for Christian Home and Family in the East Asia Christian Conference.

4. The meeting was in agreement with all the points made by Mrs. Verco and Mrs. Wyllie. Mrs. Verco referred to the United Church Women in the USA, which was part of the National Council of Churches there and hoped for something similar in Australia. Mrs. Wyllie said she too believed that there was a pattern in that organization which could guide us, although there were differences between the situations in the two countries also. Both agreed that belonging to the National Council of Churches was important.

Mrs. Baker referred to the women's work carried out by the National Council of Churches in New Zealand, where the national women's organizations produces study materials, conducts inter-church schools for women, trains women to speak on the life of their various churches, etc.

5. Mr. Taylor asked to comment on the New Zealand situation pointed out that in Australia there are state organizations, both denominational and inter-church in character interposed between any national organization and the women in the local churches. Some tasks were clearly national such as programme material requiring publication, etc. while other tasks, such as field activities clearly had to be carried out within the States.

6. The two groups shared a very deep concern for the local church woman. Much of the need for the national organization arises from the need to stimulate and help the local church woman.

Mrs. Mackay said she wanted the focus to be on "this woman who belongs to a world and to a world church and needs to know it".

Mrs. Wyllie said that in country areas particularly the relationships between the women of the various churches already exist; all that is missing is sufficient organization to make those relationships enduringly effective.

7. Mrs. Farr asked was there any danger of competing inter-church women's groups in local areas, some brought into existence through the work of the ACC and Local Inter-Church Councils affiliated with it, and others brought into existence through the work of a State Inter-Church Council. She expressed the hope that this could be avoided.

Mr. Perkins said that inter-church women's groups in local areas could develop in several ways, as Mrs. Farr suggests, but they need not be competitive if at state and national level we are all related to a national women's organization. For example, if a national organization comprising federal denominational women's organizations, state women's inter-church councils, and ACC (women's work) linked together these organizations in, say, the United Church Women of Australia, every local inter-church group could take that name, and have several affiliations - e.g. with either or both a Local Inter-Church Council affiliated with the ACC and a State Women's Inter-Church Council. An inter-church group started by a State Women's Inter-Church Council in an area where there was no local Council of Churches might lead to one coming into existence. An inter-church group in an area where there was already a Local Council of Churches would be its "women's wing". So from several initiatives, we would stimulate each other, and avoid competition by our common link in a national organization.

8. Mrs. Farr asked that the Committees for the Women's World Day of Prayer also be invited to join any national organization. She pointed out that these committees, while operating independently in each state, reach very dispersed local areas.

All were agreed that this should be done. Mrs. Wyllie said that they should also be invited to join our continuing discussions.

Mr. Perkins was asked to write to Lt.-Col. Mabel Bell inviting her to join the discussions at the next meeting called and sharing with her the background information and the general approach so far made.

9. Mrs Wyllie, while agreeing with the focus on the local church woman, said that a national organization would also tackle particular problems such as the professional woman, the working mother, etc.

10. Mr. Perkins then offered a tentative proposal which seemed to sum up the mind of the meeting.

1. That a national women's organization be formed, named the United Church Women of Australia.
2. That the UCWA be comprised of representatives of existing organizations, including Federal Denominational Women's Organizations, State Women's Inter-Church Councils, Australian Council of Churches (Committee on Women's Work), State Committees for Women's World Day of Prayer.
3. That the appointment of representatives should be so ordered that the resulting body consists fairly equally of office bearers of existing organizations and other persons appointed for personal qualities of Christian leadership. The latter could be appointed partly by the ACC and partly by cooption by the UCWA - this would ensure continuity as well as up-to-date representation of existing office bearers of the constituent organizations.
4. That the UCWA should be affiliated with the ACC, and so establish links with similar work at the international level.
5. That local inter-church women's groups could be affiliated with one or more of the constituent organizations and carry the name of the UCWA in
.....

Mr. Taylor, commenting on the proposal, pointed out that some of the constituent bodies have no national coordination of state organizations. It is difficult to convene a national organization effectively, unless representatives can have proxies to attend who live at the place where the meetings are held. He also said that the situation probably required a good meeting once a year, with people attending from all States, and an Executive which operated during the year in a fixed place.

11. The meeting then discussed how further consideration could be given to such a proposal.

Mrs. Wyllie suggested that next time we meet we should enlarge the meeting to about 30 people, in order to include the leaders of denominational women's organizations, the Women's World Day of Prayer Committees, and some Orthodox women, as well as 3 more representatives from the NSW Women's Inter-Church Council.

It was agreed:

1. that a record of the proceedings of this meeting should be the basis for discussion at a further meeting on November 9.
2. that the November 9 meeting should be enlarged as Mrs. Wyllie proposed.
3. That the invitation to the meeting should go out over the names of Mrs. Wyllie (ACC Committee on Women's Work), Mrs. Verco (N.S.W. Women's

Inter-Church Council) and Lt.-Col. Bell (Women's World Day of Prayer Committee) if possible.

4. That Mrs. Wyllie and Mrs. Verco should meet with Mr. Perkins on October 22 at 10am to finalize the record of proceedings as it will go out with the invitations to the enlarged meeting.

12. Mr. Perkins suggested that if reasonable progress was made at the November 9 meeting, plans should then be made for a national 2-day consultation with inter-state people participating early in 1963. Mrs. Verco suggested February 25 - 26, 1963.

Mr. Taylor asked that the situation of women's work in the Church of England be investigated in order to ensure that Anglican representatives at further consultations covers adequately the great diversity of women's organizations in that church.

Deaconess Andrews supported this, and enlarged on the diversity.

Mr. Taylor suggested Melbourne as the location for the national consultation. The suggestion was supported by Mrs. Verco, who spoke of the more decentralized functioning of the Women's Inter-Church Council there.

Mrs. Wyllie asked who would be responsible for organizing the Consultation, and the meeting agreed that it looked to the ACC, as the only body with staff, to undertake the task.

Mr. Perkins referred to the proximity of the proposed date to the ACC Annual Meeting, and said that if the ACC were to undertake it, it could do so more effectively if the Consultation were held in Sydney. This would enable the use of office staff, and enable the people who have led the conversations so far to guide the planning of the consultation.

The meeting then agreed on Sydney as the location, but asked that plenty of notice be given to organizations in other States.

CLOSING. The meeting closed with prayer and the benediction by the chairwoman, Mrs. Wyllie.

- - - - -

P.S. When Mrs. Wyllie, Mrs. Verco and Lt.-Col. Bell met together on October 22 (see item 8), item 12 was reconsidered because the date proposed clashed with the Women's World Day of Prayer, and because more time was needed to widen the conversation beyond N.S.W.

It was therefore agreed to propose to the meeting on November 9 that a series of consultations be held in each State early in 1963.