



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The National Council of Churches in New Zealand, which was formed in 1941, is a fellowship of churches which come together to give expression to their unity in Jesus Christ, to discuss their differences, and to plan undertakings together. The members are the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union, the Associated Churches of Christ, the Congregational Union, the Salvation Army, the Society of Friends, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Cook Islands Christian Church. Together they comprise over 82 per cent of the membership of churches in New Zealand.

The Council itself is made up of representatives of the various churches, the ratio approximating to the strength of membership. Thus the Church of England has nine voting members, the Presbyterian Church six, and so on. This whole body meets annually in July, but functions through an executive which meets monthly in Christchurch where the N.C.C. office is also located. Specialised agencies of the Council deal with Faith and Order (Dunedin), International Affairs (Auckland), Television (Wellington), Maori Affairs, and Women's and Youth Committees are also appointed nationally. The member churches, working together in local areas, have established nearly 20 branches of the N.C.C. – with their own Women's and Youth Committees – responsible to the churches in the area.

The nature of the Council is demonstrated by what it does. For example, it brings the churches together to discuss their unity and their theological differences. This happens locally, but also in national conferences on Faith and Order, as at Marsden in 1947 and at Sumner in 1955. The ways the churches can witness and cooperate in the community, in such matters as international affairs, political life, education, television, and so on, have also been discussed by national conferences at Christchurch in 1945 and at Ardmore in 1959.

Every year the Council launches a Christmas Appeal for funds for work in and through the churches of Asia. This is part of the world-wide inter-church aid programme of the ecumenical movement. The response of the congregations has risen between 1947 and 1963 from £4,000 to fifteen times that figure. In times of emergency or national disaster, the Council is able to make immediate gifts on behalf of all the churches.

In an increasing number of ways the Council acts corporately for all its members, by their decision. This is true, for example, in the appointment of prison chaplaincies; approaches to Government; and the calling of inter-church consultations on matters that may be of common concern and over a range as varied as television, a home for aged refugees, and the total work of the churches in the universities. The Council also coordinates the relationships and cooperation of member churches with the World Council of Churches and the East Asia Christian Conference.

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