



Churches of Christ?!

Last month we looked at the Distinctives of Churches of Christ and I answered some questions that were circulating about “*who we are?*”, “*what do we stand for?*” and “*why don’t Churches of Christ have faith statements?*”

This month I want to continue with answering the questions I posed in last month’s Need2Know:

“Where are your (Churches of Christ’s) Creeds?”

“Why do we (Churches of Christ) have Communion every week?”

“Why don’t we (Churches of Christ) do Christenings?”

Next month we will explore:

“Who is the State Board and what do they do?”

“What is Churches of Christ saying about current societal issues?”

“Where is State Office’s leadership?”

Again, I hope these answers provide you with some “**so that’s why**” moments that allow you to invest in your church community with intent, and participate in what is one of the most exciting, dynamic and fluid Christian Movements of the last 2 centuries—Churches of Christ!

“Where are Churches of Christ’s Creeds?”

I need to state my foundations in Churches of Christ as I recognise the next reflections on Creeds. Creeds are tools used to

- rote-teach doctrine
- measure fidelity and membership in Christian denominationalism
- distinguish one Christian denomination from another

It is worth noting that the Creeds were not rejected out of hand by our founders but they (our founders) were adamant that they were not to be used as a test of fellowship.

The Stone-Campbell movement (which is another name for Churches of Christ) preached that there is

only ‘One True Church of Christ over the earth.’ They also believed and taught that the head of the Church is “Christ Jesus”, the only one we need to adhere to. Further to that truth is the fact that there is no need for any division of the body of Christ. As such, the saying “**no creed but Christ Jesus himself**” or “No Creed but Christ” became Churches of Christ stance against such demands for creedal adherence to Doctrinal Denominationalism.

Churches of Christ do have a guiding statement which is: **In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and in all things love.**

It was adopted in a time when our founders wanted to say to the various factions and divisions of the Church, “faith in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Saviour is the essential; living by Christ Jesus’ standards as shown in the Bible is an essential!” All other matters are “non-essential” and by nature can cause division.

Gordon Stirling, one of our well-loved Ministers and leaders put it this way in his book *Churches of Christ: Reinterpreting ourselves for the New Century*. Pg 38 “In all things love. In the non-essentials of life, you have liberty but in the essentials of life, Unity in Christ Jesus.”

Perhaps in the midst and need to be answering these questions, the words of our founders and Gordon are worth listening to.

“Why do we have to have Communion every week?”

How often you “do this” in memory of Christ Jesus (Luke 22:17-19) again is not to be a point of division between the churches and denominations. However much of our practice is bound to the above statements of denominationalism.

In many denominations only the priest can officiate over communion. This, in many early churches, restricted communion to the priest’s monthly visits. However, in the Churches of Christ where all Christians are celebrated as priest’s, communion may be administered by any member of the church called to do so and we recognise the communion table as

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“the Lord’s Table.”

There are some traditions too that recognise Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 where Paul acknowledges that the church in Corinth had the practice of having a meal every time they gathered. Here, according to Paul, they obviously needed to consider each meal as the Lord’s Supper. Add to this the tradition of gathering on the first day of the week celebrating the resurrection while celebrating the ritual of remembering what Jesus death was all about, and you have the foundation of weekly Communion. As such, it has become the central point and reason for our worship. For Churches of Christ, communion has more significance and is more necessary than the sermon.

“Why don’t we do Christenings?”

The principle position of Churches of Christ is that the world was created by God and it is good. Just as Jesus asked us to “bring the children unto him”, we perform Dedications of Children to the Lord acknowledging that our children’s lives are held in the palm of Christ’s hand. Therefore, there’s no need to Christen children as that protection is already there.

The Bible makes no mention of Christenings and refers

to all baptisms as times of personal belief and surrender to the Word of God. Thus, Churches of Christ refer to baptism as “Believers Baptism”. In other words, baptism comes at a time when the believer is of a cognitive age whereby they enter into the process of Baptism for the remission of sin of their own free will. This act in our tradition is a once-off act that cannot be done for another.

I hope these explanations have helped to further your journey with Churches of Christ. If you have more questions I look forward to hearing from you.

I pray that as you prepare yourself for the coming Pentecost celebrations you are thinking about those things of faith that you are compelled to invest in by the Holy Spirit.

May you continue in the essentials of our faith, sharing the things of salvation in and through Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. And remember that we gather each week to be reminded of the essential need to surrender ourselves to Christ Jesus and share the matters of salvation. Such is Christ’s Yoke.

Scott Combridge

CEO, Churches of Christ SA/NT



Review 18 – Report 11

Report to Members of Churches of Christ

Guiding Coalition

The process of hearing from all our churches is concluded. We heard from 40 of our 50 Churches which is a great sample of our movement of 56 Churches (We chose not to engage our 6 United Churches). It was also good to receive a response from the board of CareWorks who continue to invest in the life, mission and future of our congregations’ mission activities in their communities. Collation of all the feedback from the Churches and individuals who contributed to the Guiding Coalition Review is now under way. There will be a lot to feed back once that summary is complete and we are looking to Convention to share this information with our churches as they are in attendance, or through their delegates to Convention, so put those dates in your diaries.

Financial Review Committee

By now our churches will have received a letter from the Financial Review Committee. This group of prominent business people have been tasked with reviewing our financial structures and practices. At their last meeting the FRC determined that the State Board/State Office financials that have been supplied to them are only half of the financial picture of who

Churches of Christ in SA and NT are. Given the autonomous nature of our churches, the FRC have determined that they need to see the whole picture to review our actual fiscal position. Thus their request of the affiliated churches (who are the Conference of Churches of Christ in SA/NT Inc.) to share the other half of the picture.

They will be reporting their explorations to the Review Team in due course which will add to the picture of how we are travelling at the moment.

Prayer Group

Please continue to be in prayer for our Review team who will be collating the Guiding Coalition visits, and the Financial Review Committee as they explore their findings and prepare to share them with us all as a Conference.

May we live with all hope and anticipation of our Lord’s kingdom that is formed within us as we journey towards Pentecost. That moment in our human story when the relationship to Christ Jesus was cemented in the giving of the Holy Spirit. May that gracious gift continue to guide us in hope and breathe into our community new life and new opportunities for the sharing of the Good News well into the future.

Scott Combridge

Why do we Ordain?

Following the ordination service held at our State Conference Celebration last year, a question was brought to my attention; *'why do Churches of Christ ordain people anyway?'*

The short answer is ordination is a process whereby the broader church recognizes the call God has placed on someone's life for vocational ministry.

Perhaps E.L. Williams explains it best, "Ordination is setting apart for the task rather than an office. One is set aside for a task as long as, in the judgement of the community, [s]he performs it diligently and effectively. The office is not something that exists in the form of status and privilege, but in terms of responsibility and effectiveness in a task."¹

Ordination was a contentious issue in the early developments of Churches of Christ, as our founders sought to articulate an ecclesial identity outside the restrictive structures of organized religion that affirmed the 'priesthood' of all Christian believers. The aspirations of the founders were challenged by the practical reality of the need for appropriately recognized leadership for congregations. Alexander Campbell conceded that there was a biblical precedent for the calling and setting aside of certain people for the tasks of preaching, teaching and evangelism. To lay hands upon and pray for those who were set aside for this task (Acts 6:1-6) has been the accepted practice for recognizing those we ordain.

In the 19th century, ordination was the task of the elders at local congregational level to ordain a resident preacher under the 'one man system' who would cooperate with the elders as a teacher, preacher and evangelist.³ This was seen to be an imperfect model but justifiably necessary. However, as the Movement entered the 20th century, there was much more activity with 'ordained ministers' moving from church to church. The ordained minister didn't just belong to the authority of one church. Therefore, it was considered that ordination could not be the responsibility of one church alone, but the responsibility belonged to the whole Church.

Assemblies of churches were organized as early as 1886 in parts of mid-west USA to set standards for authorized ordination of ministry candidates. In 1964 the Disciples Convention meeting at Detroit resolved that ordination is a "rite, or ceremony of the whole church, local and ecumenical, current and eternal and is to be performed under the guidance of the State or area Committee."⁴

Standards for ordination had already been set at a convention meeting in 1939. The expectations of a presenting candidate were as follows:

1. Good moral character and personal fitness for ministry.
2. A full college course, and if possible graduate training in Christian theology and practice.
3. Experience in Christian ministry that shows real leadership, vision, pastoral qualities and preaching ability.⁵

These standards continue to be driving principles for setting people aside for ordination with Churches of Christ in Australia today. We have a National body, the Churches of Christ Council in Australia (CCCA) who is representative of 'the whole Church' with regards to ordination. The federal policy for ordination sets the standards. It's slightly longer than the original three but the principles remain the same. Collectively, as representatives appointed by the congregations of churches from around Australia, we discern an individual's call and suitability for ministry in any recognized Churches of Christ ministry context. The CCCA affirms the recommendations of each State Conference who have done their due diligence in assessing the suitability of each candidate. They must have completed an approved course of study in theological education, attended to the appropriate formation required for ministers discerning their call in vocational ministry, have a good understanding of Churches of Christ history and identity, and meet other standards set by the policy for endorsement by that state body. Endorsement for ministry is the prerequisite for ordination.

We continue the practice of ordination collectively as the whole church as a way of affirming the vocational call of those who are dedicating their lives to serving God through the various expressions of Churches of Christ today. An endorsed and ordained minister is affirmed of this call each time they are inducted into a new role.

Mark Riessen

Mission & Ministry Director,
Churches of Christ SA & NT

Director, Tabor Churches of Christ Study Centre



¹Williams E.L. *'Churches of Christ – An Interpretation'*
Melbourne: Vital Publications, 1980, p54

²Blowers, P.M., ed. *'The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement'*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. p524

³*Ibid* p52

⁴*Ibid* p52

⁵Blowers, P.M., et al, eds. *'The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History'*, Danvers: Chalice, 2013. p170

Monday 14th May, 12.30 pm

Joni Cottrell, from the Australian Refugee Association, will discuss emerging trends in settlements in Adelaide and navigating cultural awareness with new arrivals and refugee communities.

This will be an important conversation for all our Church communities as we seek to reach out to new arrivals with God's love.

Venue: **The CareWorks Studio**
114 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville
Catering: **BYO lunch**—tea/ coffee provided
Enquiries: **8234 5802**

"**Lunchtime @ the Studio**" is an ongoing series of gatherings for Ministers and Key Church Leaders to discuss important social issues and how our church communities might respond.

www.cwsa.org.au
www.facebook.com/GivingHelpOfferingHope

Call to Pray....You are invited to join with people across our churches in praying for one another. This month we pray together for:

Kadina, Kersbrook, Lenswood, Life Care Congregations, Loxton.

Convention: 2018

Please add **November 16/17** to your diaries now. We want to build on the success of last year's Convention and find ways to support churches unable to attend.

Morialta Charitable Trust

Fund has been supporting disadvantaged Children, Young People and their families in South Australia through its annual program of Distributions for 40 years. Donations of \$2- and above are Tax Deductible and can be forwarded to the Morialta Charitable Trust Fund at PO Box 92, Crafrers SA 5152.



Ambae track & landscape covered in ash.

Ambae Volcano Update

On the 12th of April the Vanuatu Government declared a state of emergency on the island of Ambae. The volcano risk remains at level three, and the declaration of the state of emergency was in response to the continual ash fall, acid rain and the effect it was having on the living conditions for local people. Only days before, GMP staff members and Partners from Churches of Christ in Vanuatu visited communities, hearing about the effect of the ash fall and the impact of the last emergency response funded by GMP.

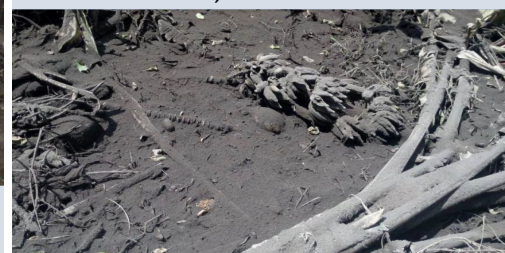
The impact of the volcano is seen in damaged gardens, contaminated water sources and there is ongoing concern for the health of Ambae residents. Emergency assistance has arrived from the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), as well as a few other organisations. The vouchers funded by GMP and Kiwi Link donors, have reached Churches of Christ communities, allowing them to purchase essential supplies.

The Vanuatu Government and NDMO are yet to decide people if will be able to stay on Ambae or if they will be relocated. GMP will be guided in our response by what is best for the good of the people of Ambae. We are monitoring the situation, and will act as quickly and effectively as possible.

In the meantime please pray for the people of Ambae. Pray for the government and NDMO as they discern the best response for people's safety, and pray for our partners and the Churches of Christ communities we support.



View of Ambae and the ash cloud pluming up from the volcano, over the island and out to sea.



Bananas on the ground covered in ash.