

# Re-formation TODAY

by GERALDINE HAWKES

As part of the lead-up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, an ecumenical working party of Lutherans and Catholics has been planning a program of projects and events to jointly commemorate the occasion. One is a series of articles, written by Lutheran and Catholic authors from around Australia, to be published in both Lutheran and Catholic publications. The final piece in our series of six is by Geraldine Hawkes, Ecumenical Facilitator of the South Australian Council of Churches (SACC). She was also the first Catholic to hold the role of Executive Officer of the SACC.



It seems timely to be writing on the subject 'Re-formation today' as we journey through spring, towards summer. When I think of these months, I think of how our landscape in the southern parts of Australia is transformed, as rain and cloud give way to warmth and light. So it is also on the ecumenical journey, especially as we ponder 500 years since the Reformation, a time that radically changed the landscape of our ecclesial life. There are signs that the

climate between us as Catholics and Lutherans is changing: that warmth and light guide our journey together, and that re-formation – or perhaps, transformation – is possible.

When I think of the individuals from the time of the Reformation, and beyond, I give thanks for all who, in seeking faithfulness to the gospel, drew attention to or acted on aspects of our faith life together in which some of us may have been living in the shadows. I like to think that such insights were both offered and received in a spirit of faith, hope

and love. However, I do wonder to what extent the internal disposition informed or inhibited gracious listening and learning.

Today I am inspired by two movements, both of which invite us into a new disposition towards one another.

The first is Receptive Ecumenism, which offers a fresh ecumenical methodology emphasising listening, learning and receptivity; about learning from others in order to learn about ourselves. It

requires openness to the Holy Spirit, and calls for a spirit of self-awareness, vulnerability and humility. The potential of Receptive Ecumenism is that our structures, systems, practices and processes may be transformed to more clearly radiate the warmth and light of Christ.

The second source of inspiration comes from the person of Pope Francis. One example, pertinent to the marking of the Reformation, comes from his homily during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year when he said that:

**'As Bishop of Rome and pastor of the Catholic Church, I want to ask for mercy and forgiveness for the behaviour of Catholics towards Christians of other Churches which has not reflected Gospel values. At the same time, I invite all Catholic brothers and sisters to forgive if they, today or in the past, have been offended by other Christians. We cannot cancel out what has happened, but we do not want to let the weight of past faults continue to contaminate our relationships. God's mercy will renew our relationships ...' [Reference <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-homily-for-christian-unity-vespers> ]**

As we continue to traverse this landscape together, I feel encouraged that if our individual and our ecclesial dispositions can be imbued with self-awareness, humility, mercy and forgiveness, we together will be transformed, and the warmth and light of Christ will shine in our world.

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Geraldine Hawkes