

The Executive last met in November 2019. In January 2020, we began to hear about the 'flu' virus (COVID-19) in China. As we have witnessed, it has since spread globally with devastating impact. There have been more than 10 million confirmed cases worldwide, and more than half a million deaths. The 2019-20 bushfire season in Australia (known as the Black Summer) had hundreds of out of control fires that went on for months, with the major fires during December–January. The fires burnt an estimated 18.6 million hectares (46 million acres), destroyed over 5,900 buildings (half of them homes) and killed at least 34 people. Some people are still living in tents or makeshift housing. The death of George Floyd has triggered protests around the world to protest that #blacklivesmatter, and opened up serious discussions about systemic racism. The word 'unprecedented' has been invoked on many occasions; many are asking if we have swung into a 'new normal' and what it means going forward. And then there's the environmental emergency... I'm interested in the way we do our theological reflection, how we discern what God is up to, what new opportunities are emerging in the 'new normal' (if there is such a thing), how we resource our member associations, how we gather stories about diaconal ministry in the midst of the 'unprecedented' circumstances in which we are living.

### **Changes to our planning**

Early on in COVID-19, the Executive agreed to meet as planned in Germany in July 2020. However, the spread of the virus and lockdowns enforced by countries as well as the significant reduction of international flights made meeting face to face impossible, and the Executive agreed to the proposal to cancel the meeting. The Executive will now meet via Zoom over 4 consecutive days in July 2020. Members of the Executive are in many places around the world, beginning with Fiji and all the way around to Seattle, so there is only a slim window in which we can all be online together. Even brief daily meetings will enable us to do some of the work that needs to be done. The Executive also agreed to the proposal to postpone the DIAKONIA World Assembly planned for mid 2021. There were a number of factors to consider including general uncertainty, the financial impact of COVID-19 on member associations and individuals, the disruption to international flights and being able to book ahead, and the ongoing threats to public health posed by COVID-19 including the fact that there is no guarantee a virus will be developed that will assure people that travel is safe. Realistically, airlines are saying a return to the 'old' normal may not be until 2023. The Executive will need to discuss the implications of this changing landscape.

### **DIAKONIA Assembly**

I have been part of the team meeting regularly for planning. Christa Megaw will provide more detailed information in her report on the Assembly. The program, electives, post-conference tours were all well advanced but COVID-19 has scuttled plans for the mid 2021 Assembly. The Executive will have an opportunity to discuss options for moving forward. We need to clarify the impact of a delay of the DIAKONIA Assembly on planning for regional assemblies. In this conversation, the idea of a virtual 'mini-conference' may be considered, perhaps to add into the cycle of DIAKONIA World Assembly and regional assemblies (ie alternate years). The Festival of Homiletics and the World Lutheran Federation are among those that have successfully transitioned to online conferences (the Festival of Homiletics this year due to COVID19).

### **President's blogsite**

I have been following the World Council of Churches ecumenical prayer cycle and when it names a country where we have a member association, I research as best I can some information to include in a post. I hope this is a means to broaden awareness of other member associations, and to inform our prayers for each other. A link is added to the DIAKONIA Facebook page.

### **Facebook**

Diane will have information about the Facebook page. It is always good to see members of the DIAKONIA Executive posting, and others with worthwhile contributions. I've particularly appreciated Ted Dod's prayers. Many grateful thanks! From time to time we have requests from people to join, most of which must be declined as there is no information provided to indicate they are from a member association. On the other hand, it would be good to encourage everyone in member associations to be part of the DIAKONIA Facebook page as it is such a great way to quickly share information and relevant news.

## **DIAKONIA e-news**

At the 2019 meeting, the Executive agreed to the proposal that the form and circulation of the DIAKONIA news changed to a regular e-news. Historically (and until about 10 years ago) the DIAKONIA News was prepared in print form and posted to member associations. A positive was that a print copy was able to be made available to theological libraries. Editors for many years were Ulrike Kellner ("German editor") and the late Jane Martin ("English editor"). When Jane retired as Editor, I was appointed as English editor, to work with Ulrike for several editions of DIAKONIA News. I enjoyed the sourcing of materials very much. It was always a pleasure to work with Ulrike who worked in a very professional manner. The move to electronic circulation provided the means to distribute to a wider group of people because (technically) the DIAKONIA News could be forwarded on by the recipient to others in their association. It was agreed in recent years that the DIAKONIA News would be mainly focussed on sharing news from the DIAKONIA Executive meetings. Laura Lazar (English editor) and Ulrike Kellner did the work on preparing the content. In 2019, the decision was made to move to a regular e-news rather than an annual DIAKONIA news publication. The small team working on this is Jan Cherry, Diane Kaufmann, Ted Dodd and myself. One e-news has been produced and circulated, and the team anticipates that a regular pattern for the e-news cycle will be established. The team plans to meet again early in July. The sourcing of material remains both a joy and a challenge. One of the roles of the DIAKONIA Executive is to enable sharing of news in order for member associations to learn from and with each other, and to pray for one another. The commitment to provide more regular e-news has the potential to be current, relevant and interactive, and be a valuable source of information.

Feedback is always appreciated!

Recommendation: that we formally write to Ulrike and to Laura specifically acknowledging their contribution to DIAKONIA News, and especially Ulrike whose term as German Editor has been over a very long period of time.

## **President - nominations and elections**

In a usual cycle, nominations for DIAKONIA President would be brought to the 2021 Assembly. We need to discuss an option for a one year extension, anticipating a 2022 Assembly. I am able to continue if that is deemed to be appropriate. Alternatively, we need to discuss the process for elections to be held if we do not meet face to face for an Assembly.

In a related question, it may be worth considering having the newly retired President remaining on the Executive as a resource person, as happens with a number of organisations (and was suggested to me by a member of the current Executive). Hopefully it goes without saying that the newly retired President is a valuable resource to the incoming President.

## **Personal**

COVID-19 period has been a creative, generative time. I've moved from the usual routine to filming and editing 2 Sunday worship services a week, plus Zoom for the third worship service. Zoom has proved to be a great tool for meetings (which will continue for some of the meetings in which I'm involved) - there seem to be more meetings now than ever! COVID-19 has meant it's been impossible to plan to travel to London to meet my new grandson (now 12 weeks old) so probably won't meet him until sometime in 2021, nor support my son and his wife when she had to return to hospital with a fever due to a 'retained' placenta, but could not take her week old son, and Nick had to manage the baby's care on his own for a few days with neighbours ferrying the milk from hospital to home. Neither was allowed to visit Kathy in hospital. And my Melbourne based family had a month with the 1 year old grandson battling with fever, resulting in numerous doctor visits and 2 hospital admissions. The last diagnosis was 3 concurrent viruses (but not COVID-19). It was difficult not being able to visit. These last few months have been quite a challenge but I'm grateful for technology that provides such an easy way to communicate. My experience is multiplied by millions as COVID-19 has separated families and loved ones, and most poignantly when celebrations have to be delayed, and in times of sorrow when people have not been able to accompany loved ones in their dying days nor hold services of thanksgiving with family and friends. Families had weeks when they were unable to visit loved ones in aged care.

Blessings to you! I look forward to meeting with the DIAKONIA Executive Committee via Zoom!

Rev Sandy Boyce, President,  
DIAKONIA World Federation  
July 2020