

WATAC INC REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

6TH MAY 2015 TO 10TH JUNE 2016

WATAC's last AGM was held on 6th May 2015 in the Jubilee Room in NSW Parliament House following our 19th Annual Luncheon. It is now 20 years that we have been celebrating our 30 years of active life with a beautiful gathering in our Parliament House. We thank Sophie Cotsis MLC and her staff for their support which for some years has enabled us to hold such gatherings here, and the Parliamentary Hosts previous to Sophie who also generously supported WATAC. Jodi Harrison, who was Shadow Minister for Women in 2015, also got in touch with WATAC wanting to be in on-going contact with us, and attended this year's Luncheon.

Our WATAC Luncheon is always much enhanced by the input of dedicated and inspiring speakers. In May 2015, Donella Johnston spoke and Trish Hindmarsh facilitated the open forum which followed. Donella came up from Canberra to speak as a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Commission on Women and Trish Hindmarsh joined us from her home in Tasmania. Great women doing great things!

As well as enthusiastic WATAC members, partners and friends were also enriched by the presence of some senior school students and their teachers. Each year we invite the students to be involved in many ways in the Luncheon process and it is always a blessing to have them celebrate with us.

WATAC is also involved in organising for senior students studying the HSC Studies of Religion Course an Interfaith day in the Parliament House Theatre. In November 2015, over 120 students, teachers and WATAC-ers attended this event. The theme of the day is *'Religion and Peace – What are the Challenges and Implications for us all?'* and our speakers in 2015 were Sr Jan Barnette rsj (Christian), Elsie Heiss (Indigenous spirituality), Semra Avcugullari (Muslim) and Sandy Hollis (Jewish). All these women were both committed and well-informed and their input was much appreciated by all present. WATAC is planning to organise another such Interfaith Day in November 2016.

Maybe one of the most significant actions WATAC undertook in mid-2015 was initiated by Carmel Maguire at our last AGM. Carmel is a very committed WATAC-er (Eastern Suburbs Group) and she spoke about having noticed that WATAC finances were significantly low and she proposed we write to all members to ask for their financial support to help us continue doing all in which we are now involved. Those at the 2015 AGM agreed, Carmel wrote the letter, Helen and Bernice mailed it out, and the consequence was a generous \$17,575 response from many WATAC-ers. We are much more financially healthy now. Thank you Carmel and WATAC-ers all.

The WATAC Newsletter is produced by Helen and Bernice and typeset by Margaret Knowlden, four times a year and is sent out as hard copy or emailed nationally and internationally. For those living beyond NSW it is their main contact with WATAC. Many of our international members often reply by email or beautiful postcards assuring us of their joy in receiving the Newsletter and all it contains.

In July 2015 Maria Stanton, an American academic, emailed Helen Coles to ask for her help. Maria is Director of Production at the American Theological Library Association and she was planning to visit Australia. Her main interest was to contact someone from Women-Church regarding their wonderful journal which is now no longer produced but was for very many years. Margaret Knowlden was type-setter of the Women-Church journal for years so she and I caught up with Maria in Sydney. Margaret helped Maria to get access to electronic copies of the journal which will now be available for Maria's students in America. Maria also continues to be in contact with WATAC through our e-newsletter.

In September 2015 WOW organised its international Conference in Philadelphia USA. Trish and Vin Hindmarsh attended it on behalf of WATAC. Paul Collins and Marilyn Hatton were very involved in the organisation of the WOW Conference and in its actual daily process. The theme of the Conference was '*Gender, Gospel and Global Justice*'. It was a very significant event for WATAC to be involved in, especially as Pope Francis was also present in America at the same time; while the second Synod on the Family which closely followed it (in Rome) was also a focus of the Conference.

WATAC networks with other grassroots groups working for change in the Catholic Church and we have membership in WOW and Catholics for Ministry. Recently WATAC was contacted by a member of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse, Canice Kinnane, who asked if we would respond to their latest Issues Paper 11. While the reply time space is quite brief we agreed to respond as well as we can. Marilyn Hatton enabled this connection between Canice Kinnane and WATAC.

In March Cathy McGowan, the independent federal member for Indi, who is also a long-time WATAC member contacted us to draw our attention to an unjust issue she had been drawn into. Archbishop Hart had compelled the Catholic Social Services to cancel their invitation to Cathy to give the Mary MacKillop Oration at their Victorian Conference. Archbishop Hart's action was in response to Cathy's co-sponsorship of Warren Entsch MP's private members bill regarding marriage equality. Helen Coles wrote an article for our March Newsletter to alert WATAC-ers to support Cathy, and Cathy has appreciated that greatly and has kept in touch with us regarding that.

There are wonderful WATAC groups who meet regularly in each other's homes to reflect, discuss and share and they have been doing so for many years. Many of these groups organise very meaningful prayer reflections in the spirit of the Acts of the Apostles 2.46 "They met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared food gladly and generously." WATAC Group meetings are meetings are very life giving experiences.

Helen Coles liaises with Jason Rhodes of Cube Solutions to keep the WATAC website current. We have issues with spam email going to our @watac.net addresses and this began to happen for our Engadine contact person with messages coming via the WATAC website. A decision was made to redirect to Helen all contact via the group contacts on the website and she will forward genuine enquiries to the relevant people. The issue of spam is one many organisations far bigger than WATAC have been unable to avoid despite the safeguards and filters in place. We have on-going traffic to the website and will soon add to our links page *Australian Catholics for Equality* a small collective group who support those in the LGBTQI community, their friends and loved ones. One of the co-convenors of the group, Benjamin Oh contacted Helen Coles recently to introduce himself and let us know how much they appreciate having the WATAC website as a resource they can recommend to people.

WATAC's activities are all made possible by the commitment of the WATAC Inc Working Group. They meet regularly in Alma Madden's home to think, discuss and plan what to do and how to do it – fantastic women that they are! The members of the Working Group are Jan Barnett, Janet Cain, Margaret Day, Kaye Hodge, Margaret Keyes, Alma Madden and Bernice Moore. Helen Coles is our administrative officer, Maureen Watterson our Treasurer, and Margaret Knowlden our Newsletter typesetter. All these women are wonderful hands-on people who enable WATAC to keep active, without them it would be hard to imagine how we would achieve all we do. Let's thank them now for their on-going commitment and if any of you would like to join this wonderful hands-on group please don't hesitate to let us know today.

Thank you.

Bernice Moore - WATAC co-ordinator