

Living with the Neighbour who is Different

christian faith in a multi religious world

INTRODUCTORY NOTES FOR LEADERS AND STUDY GUIDES

A supplemental resource to be used with the booklet
Living with the Neighbour who is Different:
Christian Faith in a Multi Religious World



Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly
PO Box A2266
Sydney South NSW 1235
t: 02 8267 4300
f: 02 8267 4222
www.assembly.uca.org.au

Living with the Neighbour who is Different

Study Guides

Introductory Notes For Leaders

Living with the Neighbour who is Different is the title of a book published recently by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The book was first presented as a Report to the Uniting Church in Australia's Ninth Assembly (July 2000). Written by Rev Dr Keith Rowe, this Report was compiled in consultation with the Relations with Other Faiths Reference Group and on behalf of the Doctrine Working Group of Theology and Discipleship - national agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia. This book was distributed to every congregation early in 2002. The Assembly requested some studies be prepared to assist congregations to explore the book. The studies are available only from the web site of the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly Working Group on Relations with Other Faiths (www.assembly.uca.org.au/rof/), and have been formatted as PDF files. They can be downloaded for use and are available free of charge.

The purpose of the book is to provide 'an initial attempt to explore what it might mean for us as part of the Church of Jesus Christ to live alongside the neighbour who believes differently.'

The Study Guides

1. Purpose

The purpose of the five studies is:

- to provide an opportunity for people of various ages and life experience with a congregation to explore what it might mean for us as part of the Church of Jesus Christ to live alongside the neighbour who believes differently
- to give guidance to those who might prepare and lead discussion about *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*
- to raise awareness of the daily experiences of Christians who encounter people of many faiths and who seek opportunities for interfaith dialogue and to act in neighbourly love towards those of other religions (see *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 6-13)
- to encourage and equip Christians to share their faith in a context of dialogue (see *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, page 56)

2. Some operating assumptions

The study guides make several assumptions about the studies themselves and those who participate. These include:

- **Books and reading:** Everyone involved in the study sessions will have a copy or have access to a copy of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*. These can be purchased through MediaCom Education Inc at www.mediacom.org.au
- **Leader preparation:** The leader of the study sessions will have read the book before preparing the studies. The suggestion is that the person leading the study sessions will have spent at least two hours preparing for each study session. This includes time researching and drawing on resources for prayer, devotions, story telling and the sharing of experiences. Remember, your story and experiences are important and can be shared. Remember too that you can be both leader and learner and that your preparation is essential for the quality of the study session.
- **Participants:** The people participating in the study sessions will most likely be adults and / or young adults. The studies are not intended for use by young people of secondary school age or younger. The educational style of the study guides assumes preparation for adult learners. Participants will attend each of the five studies with a copy of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* and their Bible. Leaders may also devise and offer an act of covenanting with the group as a whole, committing themselves seriously to the five week program.
- **Time required:** Each study session will provide sufficient material for around one and half to two hours of meeting time
- **Participants preparation:** Each study will give guidance as to preparation participants might undertake prior to the session and in readiness for the next session.
- **Outcomes:** The results or outcomes of the studies will be greatly influenced by the life experience and stories of people participating in the study sessions - both those stories and experience brought into the study by individuals, and those pursued by the groups' members during and following the study sessions.
- **Adult learning:** adults learn autonomously. That is, adult learn what they want to, when they want to, the way they want to. Your study sessions will be more effective when they:
 - ✓ offer opportunity to shape the goals and objectives of the session
 - ✓ make use of personal stories and experience
 - ✓ connect strongly with participants stated goals and objectives
 - ✓ are offered options in terms of activities, topics and themes for learning
 - ✓ are assisted to identify a problem to be solved or a task to be accomplished
 - ✓ experience teaching and learning methods that closely connect with their goals and objectives
 - ✓ are able to recognise what they have learnt and are given an opportunity to express that learning in new ways
 - ✓ can interact as a group as well as undertake individual learning quests. Each of these characteristics calls for some design of the study sessions by the leader. They also imply that each of sessions should be a little different in some significant way. Look out for predictability!

3. Study Guide layout

Each of the study guides follows a standard layout, providing a simple educational process. At the heart of these studies is the hope that the ways in which those participating in the study sessions live their lives will deepen both their understandings of and commitment to the practices of Christian faith discovered during the studies.

The Study guides have four main sections:

- **Purpose of the Study session** - these notes set out in general terms the topics and sections of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* to be covered and engaged during each study. We encourage leaders to add their own goals and objectives for the session, and to include the objectives of the participants in that exercise as well. This section will also include the preparation assumed of the participants prior to attending the study session.
- **Getting Started** - these notes provide guidance for beginning the study sessions. Essentially they can be used to assist participants to reflect on their recent experiences, names the realities as they encounter them and recall details from *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* that have caught their attention in the time since the previous study. The activities suggested are a good place to introduce personal experience and stories as well as prayers and devotional activities.
- **Thinking and reflecting** - these notes provide a sequence of activities for exploring *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* and responding to the issues raised or questions posed by the text. It is not the purpose of the activities to add to the text, but rather to focus on the text of the book. However, if personal stories and experiences can assist participants to make significant connections between themselves and the content of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, then by all means make use of these.
- **Moving On** - these notes provide a way to help participants move from the more detached study of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* to beginning to apply the learning and insights to their own understandings and practices of daily living. For many people, this will be the most difficult aspect of the studies because, for most adults, such learning and insight remains a private matter. However, we encourage those leading the study sessions to persist in seeking application and evaluation of feelings, attitudes, behaviours and ideas. The author of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* and the agencies of the Church commissioned this work to help

people in Uniting Church congregations think deeply and act differently as a significant contribution to Australia's future (see page 4).

Information and courses in other religions are available from Coolamon College as well as some of the other Uniting Church Theological Colleges. Your minister will know how to contact Coolamon and the Colleges.

- **For the next session** - gives advice about the reading required for the next session and has some suggestions about a devotion to end the session.

4. The study setting

Attention to the setting in which the studies will take place is critical to the quality of the experience for the participants. Participants need:

- To feel welcome: make sure each person has received the correct information and a copy of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different* well before they arrive at the first session. Directions about the meeting place, details of dates and times, some simple outline of the commitment expected will help participants to prepare.
- To be comfortable: arrange furniture and space to ensure easy conversation, access to resources, natural focus points for displays and so on.
- Confidence in the leader: your preparation, attention to hospitality and welcome, and clarity about the relevant details of the sessions will greatly assist participants to feel confident in your leadership of the study sessions.
- To feel valued for their contribution: make use of their stories and experiences, photographs and other materials that add a personal touch to the sessions. Where possible, give opportunity to address personal questions, needs, insights and issues. When using small groups with the session, allow time for reporting back to the group as a whole. If possible, find a way to record the learning, insights, ideas and new course for action that arise from each session.

STUDY ONE

The Australian experience

What we will do in this session

This session is about the material in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 2-13, and includes the following sections:

- Australia - a multi faith society
- Living with the neighbour who is different
- Who are the Christians who ask these questions?
- Our previous experience with people from other faiths.

The session will include the following aims

- To express our understanding of Australia as a multi faith society
- To share our experiences of living alongside people who believe differently
- To consider the changed situation of the churches in today's world
- To reflect on our experiences with people from other Christian churches and from the Jewish tradition.

Before you meet

Read pages 2-13 of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*.

Think about any parts of the text that you want to raise in the group.

Look out for features or items of news on radio, TV, newspapers and magazines that relate to Australia as a multi faith society.

Bring along any newspapers or magazine articles that refer to these issues.

Getting started

In this opening session, spend some time getting to know one another. One way this can be done is for each person to introduce themselves, saying a little about their family or occupation or lifestyle. Each ends with a sentence such as: 'I have chosen to come to these sessions because ... '.

People are invited to make any general comments about the material they read in preparation for the session (*Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 2-13).

Thinking and reflecting

The questions and comments in this section are suggested simply as 'starters' to help the flow of the discussion. Groups and leaders can choose from a variety of methods and processes available, depending on the size and composition of the group and the time available. The questions are not meant to be exhaustive or to control the flow and focus of the group.

Australia as a multi faith society

What is a multi-faith society? What evidence is there that Australia is a multi faith society.

What is *your* experience of living in a multi faith society? What differences have you noticed during your life time that reflect changes in the make up of faith groups in Australia?

Living with the neighbour who is different

Share stories of meeting people of other faiths - at work, at home, at school. What about stories in newspapers and magazines and on TV, radio and film? Do people from other faiths get a fair go in Australia?

How do you *feel* about Australia being a multi faith society? Do you welcome it? Resent it? Does it somehow make you apprehensive? How do you deal with these feelings?

How would you describe the advantages and disadvantages of living in a multi faith society?

What do you think of Volf's 'Theology of embrace' (page 8)? He suggests that Christians should welcome a multi faith society as an expression of God's power to re-connect the human family. Do you have any problems with this point of view? Share in the group.

Who are the Christians who ask these questions?

Douglas Hall (page 10) reminds us that the churches are in a new situation of powerlessness today. What is the evidence for this? Is it your experience of the churches in Australia? How do you react to the new situation?

If Australian churches are no longer as powerful as they were, what effect does this have on our attitude to people from other faiths?

Our previous experience with people of other faiths

Share your experiences - positive and negative - of being involved in ecumenical gatherings; and your daily meetings and friendships with Christians from other traditions.

Can you explain the need to be more sensitive that Christians once were about how we refer to the Jewish people and their traditions? How does this affect the way we worship (especially on Good Friday!) and how we study the Bible?

Are there any other issues that you want to raise from your reading of these four sections in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*?

Moving on

Name any changes in lifestyle, attitude or behaviour that you want to make as a result of your reading and reflection during the session.

Share any information you have about books, resources or study courses that would help people in the group understand some of the issues raised in the session.

For the next session

Read *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 13-24.

Finish the session with a prayer and a blessing. There are some excellent prayers in *Gift of Grace - Mission Prayer Handbook 2002*, available from the UCA Assembly office or from your Synod.

STUDY TWO

So many religions in the world

What we will do in this session

This session is about the material in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 13-24, and includes the following sections:

- The theological questions involved
- Three possible ways forward

The session will include the following aims

- To think about God's purposes for religion in our world
- To acknowledge that, for most of us, this journey is new and uncharted
- To consider some theological options for approaching people of other faiths (exclusive, pluralist, inclusive)
- To clarify in our own minds the issues that each approach involves

Before you meet

Read pages 13-24 of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*. Think about any parts of the text that you want to raise in the group.

Recall any issues from the previous session that you want to clarify in the group.

Getting started

If there are any new members in the group, welcome them and invite someone in the group to explain what the group discussed in the previous session.

People are invited to make any general comments about the material they read in preparation for the session (*Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 13-24).

Thinking and reflecting

As before, the questions and comments in this section are simply offered as possible starters and guidelines for the discussion.

The theological questions involved

This section raises many questions and some of them will be discussed in later sections of the book and in later sessions of the group's life. They don't all need to be resolved at this meeting!

What is wrong with the frequently expressed view that 'all roads lead to God' and 'it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe something' (page 13)?

The questions on pages 14 and 15 are basic to our understanding of the core issues. At this stage, it is probably best simply to raise them in a general way to help us identify the key theological questions. Don't try to resolve them all in this session!

Make sure that people in the group understand the questions. Give everyone an opportunity to raise anything they don't understand or want to comment on.

Both David Tracy and Robin Boyd (pages 15 and 16) refer to the difficulties involved in this 'uncharted territory'. For many Christians, it is challenging, difficult and disturbing. Many long for previous certainties when the answers to the questions raised here would have seemed obvious and easy to express.

If people in the group experience some uneasiness about the questions, assure them that they are in good company! Robin Boyd, for example, is a Uniting Church minister and teacher. He was Director of the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin from 1980-87 and knows well the problems associated with inter church and inter faith dialogue.

Three possible ways forward

*** The exclusivist option**

Make sure that everyone in the group understands what this option means. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this option?

Why do you think it was so popular in the history of the church?

Two Bible passages are mentioned on page 17. They raise questions that will be the subject of the next session and you need not spend too much time on them now, except to reflect on the comment in the text: 'Both verses reflect bitter first century debates between the emerging Christian movement and the rabbinic Jewish renewal movement'. This comment suggests an understanding about the origins and formation of the New Testament that may be new to some people in the group. Take a little time to explore what lies behind this comment. It will be important for our discussions in the next session.

*** The pluralist option**

Make sure that everyone in the group understands what this option means. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this option?

Do you understand why many people almost despair about religion? There is so much news about fanaticism, intolerance, hatred, genocide - and often in the name of religion!

Is the 'pluralist option' an adequate response to this feeling of despair about religion in general?

What does it mean to say that Pluralism leads to the abandonment of what is essential to Christianity and ultimately is about an entirely new religion (page 20)? Does this make sense to you?

- The inclusivist option

Make sure that everyone in the group understands what this option means. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this option?

What do you think of Rahner's 'anonymous Christian' (page 21)? Some have said that this is a patronising term and disrespectful of other religions, although Rahner himself never meant it to be interpreted in this way. Why would some people be uncomfortable with Rahner's or Farquhar's views (also on page 21)?

There is a warning on page 23 that sometimes people think that the church is the focus of God's saving action rather than Christ. Is this a fair warning? What does it mean?

The three options are 'tendencies rather than rigid categories' and they must not 'become a prison ... or a net we impose on other people' (page 24). Why are these helpful statements.

'We meet people, not religions' (page 24). Share your experience of how people can be wrongly categorised because of their religion and how misleading it is to think that people from a particular tradition all believe and act in exactly the same way.

Are there any other issues that you want to raise from your reading of these two sections in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*?

Moving on

Name any changes in lifestyle, attitude or behaviour that you want to make as a result of your reading and reflection during the session.

Share any information you have about books, resources or study courses that would help people in the group understand some of the issues raised in the session.

For the next session

Read *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 25-35.

Finish the session with a prayer and a blessing. Here is a prayer form Dorothy McRae-McMahon.

Dear God,
moving with your Spirit is not always easy.
The way forward
is not as clear as we would like it to be.
It sometimes feels safer to stay where we are
and then the ground goes from under our feet
and we know we have no option but to move.

Give us love for each other on the way, O God.
Show us your footsteps on the path, Jesus Christ,
and hold us safe as we go, Holy Spirit,
who is our comforter, our grace,
and the one who prays for us
even as we cannot find the words.
Amen.

From *Prayers for Life's Particular Moments*, published in Australia by DESBOOKS,
Box 51, Northcote 3070. Used by permission.

STUDY THREE

What does the Bible teach?

What we will do in this session

This session is about the material in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 25-35, and includes the following sections:

- Re-reading the Bible
- Searching the tradition

The session will include the following aims

- To reflect on possible new ways of approaching the Bible
- To consider the tension in the Bible between what is local (particularism) and what is world wide (universalism)
- To think about the Bible's teaching about God's universal love
- To look at the message of Jesus in the Gospels and in the Pauline letters
- To recall the attitudes of key people in the history of the church

Before you meet

Read pages 25-35 of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*.
Think about any parts of the text that you want to raise in the group.

Recall any issues from the previous session that you want to clarify in the group.

Getting started

If there are any new members in the group, welcome them and invite someone in the group to explain what the group discussed in the previous sessions.

People are invited to make any general comments about the material they read in preparation for the session (*Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 25-35).

Thinking and reflecting

As before, the questions and comments in this section are simply offered as possible starters and guidelines for the discussion.

Re-reading the Bible

'New questions prompt fresh readings of the Bible we thought we had understood' (page 25). How would you explain this sentence?

The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* (paragraph 5) affirms that the church has received the books of the Bible as 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated' and paragraph 11 acknowledges that God has never left the church without 'faithful and scholarly interpreters of scripture'. Bearing in mind these two paragraphs, are you generally comfortable with the approach to reading the Bible that lies behind the opening paragraph on page 25?

How do you understand the tension (described on pages 25-27) between the 'universalistic tendencies' (in some parts of the Bible) and the 'particularism of the call of Israel' (in other parts). How would you reconcile these tensions?

'Those who claim to be an "elect" people are not to imagine that that they have any monopoly of God's salvation' (page 28). How would you explain this sentence and what does 'salvation' mean in this context?

The argument on page 29 is that God's presence is as work beyond Israel. Does it surprise you to talk about God's presence beyond Christianity? Can you think of any examples of contemporary 'pagan saints'?

The Gospels reflect some of the 'inside' and 'outside' tensions that are in the Old Testament. What stories and teachings can you recall from the Gospels that are more 'universal' rather than 'particular'?

How would you explain the sentence (on page 31): 'The presence of God, focused in Jesus Christ, is not bound by the particularity of that incarnation'?

Are you comfortable with the fact that the New Testament seems to contain within itself tensions and even contradictions about Jesus' mission?

'The ways of God may be more subtle than our fragile minds can grasp' (page 31). Is this a self evident truth and, if it is, how do we know anything about God?

Searching the tradition

In the history of the church, the weight of opinion has clearly been unsympathetic to the 'universalistic' understanding of God's purposes. What reasons could you offer for this bias throughout the church's history?

'God our saviour. .. desires all human beings to be saved' (1 Timothy 2:4). How impressed are you by the arguments listed on pages 34-35 about how this is achieved? Do you have any other ideas about the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:4?

Are there any other issues that you want to raise from your reading of these two sections in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*?

Moving on

Name any changes in lifestyle, attitude or behaviour that you want to make as a result of your reading and reflection during the session.

Share any information you have about books, resources or study courses that would help people in the group understand some of the issues raised in the session.

For the next session

Read *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 36-48.

Finish the session with a prayer and a blessing. The following may be suitable - it's from the Uniting Church's *Mission Handbook* of 1996.

Time to move on

We believe you are with us, Jesus Christ,
because now and then, we find ourselves
more brave, more free and more hopeful
than we might ever have imagined we would be.

We believe you are with your church, Jesus Christ,
because just when we fear and doubt
we are given gifts
of new life, new ideas, new faith
for the next day.

We believe you are with us, Jesus Christ,
because at times when we are low
with feelings of inadequacy and guilt
or woundedness,
we are given gifts
of healing, energy and grace
which lift our hearts
and send us out with joy.

Amen.

STUDY FOUR

Non negotiables

What we will do in this session

This session is about the material in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 35-48, and includes the following sections:

- Uniting Church emphases
- Three theological affirmations

The session will include the following aims

- To name some relevant convictions from the Reformed tradition
- To recall some teachings from John Wesley and the *Basis of Union*
- To consider three basic affirmations about interfaith dialogue
- To acknowledge the beauty and diversity of God's creation
- To affirm the presence of God's Spirit in all of life
- To confess the centrality of Jesus Christ as Lord, Word of God and Son of God

Before you meet

Read pages 35-48 of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*. Think about any parts of the text that you want to raise in the group.

Recall any issues from the previous sessions that you want to clarify in the group.

Getting started

If there are any new members in the group, welcome them and invite someone in the group to explain what the group discussed in the previous sessions.

People are invited to make any general comments about the material they read in preparation for the session (*Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 35-48).

Thinking and reflecting

As before, the questions and comments in this section are simply offered as possible starters and guidelines for the discussion.

Uniting Church emphases

The suggestion (on page 35) is that there is an 'inherited Protestant caution' about interfaith dialogue. Why do you think this is such a particularly Protestant concern?

Donald McKim (pp. 35-36) proposes three Reformed convictions that are helpful. Make sure that everyone in the group understands these important points and allow opportunity to discuss their meaning.

Note that all three convictions are expressed somehow in terms of salvation. Again we need to ask what salvation means in this context. Gordon Docker's *Faith with Understanding* (Melbourne: JBCE, 1996), is helpful here. See especially pages 170-172.

John Wesley (pp. 36-38) seems to have developed a more open attitude as he grew older. Why do you think this happened? Do we all grow more open theologically as we grow older?

Recall the significance of the decision (pp. 38-39) to name the church Uniting rather than United (as in the United Church of Canada, the United Reformed Church [UK]). What are the implications of this decision?

Three theological affirmations

The three theological affirmations are 'frequently held in tension' and provide us with 'perspectives' for interfaith dialogue. Why are these two phrases in inverted commas important for our consideration in this session?

God's creation is a 'pluriverse' rather than a 'universe' says Panikkar (p. 40). What does this mean?

The material on pp. 40-43 is a good expression of the tension between the diversity of creation and the unifying purposes of God in Christ. How would you explain this tension? Are you comfortable with it?

'The true nature of love is to value the one that is different' (p. 42). Is this a realistic ideal? What does it say about our attitudes to people of different races, religion, sexual orientation, life style, etc.?

Do you understand Ewert Cousins' ideas about a 'second axial period' affirming difference and dialogue rather than distrust and exercise of power? Do you see any signs of the second axial period happening in our time?

Are you attracted by the suggestion (pp. 44-45) that the Holy Spirit is a better starting point for interfaith dialogue rather than the uniqueness of Jesus? Or is it simply a softer option?

'The life and work of Jesus does not exhaust the work or presence of God' (p. 45). Why is this statement important in understanding relations with people of other faiths?

'Our confession of Christ is ... to be affirmed as the foundation on which our life is built, the beginning of our believing ... ' (p. 46). This statement is a faith statement. In Interfaith dialogue we begin from faith - we do not compromise faith. This important affirmation is central to how we approach interfaith dialogue. Make sure everyone in the group understands the importance of this statement.

'Christian faith is not a commitment to religion in general but a way of life focused on Jesus the Christ' (p. 47). How do the arguments on pages 47 and 48 encourage you to deeper faith in Jesus as Word of God in the context of interfaith dialogue?

John Cobb (p, 48) suggests that loyalty to Jesus Christ involves openness to other faiths and Australian Jesuit Brendan Byrne talks of Jesus as living out the radical 'hospitality of God' . How do these insights encourage openness among Christians towards people of other faiths?

Are there any other issues that you want to raise from your reading of these two sections in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*?

Moving on

Name any changes in lifestyle, attitude or behaviour that you want to make as a result of your reading and reflection during the session.

Share any information you have about books, resources or study courses that would help people in the group understand some of the issues raised in the session.

For the next session

Read *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 49-63.

Finish the session with a prayer and a blessing. The following may be suitable:

Almighty God
on the day of Pentecost
you sent your Holy Spirit to the disciples
with the wind from heaven and in tongues of flame,
filling them with joy and boldness
to preach the gospel.

Send us out in the power of the same Spirit
to witness to your truth
and to draw all people to the fire of your love.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From *Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation*, (Melbourne: JBCE, 1989).

STUDY FIVE

What about mission?

What we will do in this session

This session is about the material in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 49-62, and includes the following sections:

- Christian mission in a multi-religious world
- A spirituality for inter-religious dialogue

The session will include the following aims

- To consider the call to spread the good news
- To reflect on mission as sharing in God's mission
- To look at some contemporary *Guidelines* for exercising mission
- To examine four proposals for interfaith dialogue
- To think about new ways of being Christian in a multi faith society
- To discover the importance of a deeper spirituality in interfaith dialogue

Before you meet

Read pages 49-62 of *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*.

Think about any parts of the text that you want to raise in the group.

Recall any issues from the previous sessions that you want to clarify in the group.

Getting started

If there are any new members in the group, welcome them and invite someone in the group to explain what the group discussed in the previous sessions.

People are invited to make any general comments about the material they read in preparation for the session (*Living with the Neighbour who is Different*, pages 49-62).

Thinking and reflecting

As before, the questions and comments in this section are simply offered as possible starters and guidelines for the discussion.

Christian mission in a multi-religious world

The great commission (Matthew 28:19-20) requires us to make disciples of all the nations. The period of church growth (until fairly recently) was an obvious way of fulfilling this command. With the decline in church growth and influence, what new ideas about mission are emerging? Does the quote from Emilio Castro (pp. 49-50) help clarify the issues?

'God's purpose for the fullness of time embraces in ways beyond our imagining the unity of humankind' (p. 52). Once again, we are reminded of the limitations of our understanding of the mind of God (see Romans 11 :33-34). Are you disturbed by this kind of statement?

Kenneth Cragg (quoted on pp. 52-3) says that the most important thing in Christian mission is not to increase numbers of converts ... but to encourage among Christians 'the increase of Christlike persons'. This seems to alter radically our understanding of mission. Does such an approach appeal to you? Why? How would you reconcile it with Matthew 28:19?

What do you think about *The Code of Conduct of the UK Inter-Faith Network*?

The Methodist Church in the UK has clearly struggled with these issues (pp. 54-55). Do you find their principles helpful?

'Christian freedom in the Spirit can mean that no guilt or drivenness dogs evangelism' (p. 55). What does this mean? Are Christians guilty if they do not evangelise?

Are you enthusiastic about the four 'dialogues' outlined on page 56? Which 'dialogue' best describes where you are at the moment? Which one is your next goal and what needs to be happen to enable you to achieve this goal?

The ministry of reconciliation is affirmed (p. 57). How can you encourage this ministry in your Presbytery and Synod?

A spirituality for inter-religious dialogue

Living with the neighbour who is different is an increasing reality for many Christians in Australia and calls for a new way of being Christians (p. 58). In the light of these studies, how would you sum up this new way?

The new situation means learning to live with unanswered questions (p. 59). Why should this be so difficult for people of faith?

The new situation requires great personal honesty (p. 60), facing out past errors with honesty and integrity, and engaging in serious dialogue with people from other cultures and faith traditions. What opportunities are there for this new openness in your life? At work, in school, in political life, in the church?

'In a strange way, encounter with the other leads us back to a fresh encounter with Christ' (p.61). How has this been your experience?

Are there any other issues that you want to raise from your reading of these two sections in *Living with the Neighbour who is Different*?

How would you sum up your experiences of these five sessions?

Moving on

Name any changes in lifestyle, attitude or behaviour that you want to make as a result of your reading and reflection during the session.

Share any information you have about books, resources or study courses that would help people in the group understand some of the issues raised in the session.

Finishing the session

Finish the session with a prayer and a blessing. The following may be suitable:

Beside and around us
live people of other faiths -
Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh
and others too.
They are your beloved people, God.
You have commanded us to love them.

We sense their lives are sustained by their faith ... We
see them following the practices of their faith ... We
hear them telling what they believe.

Grant us the confidence to be your witnesses ...
To practise our faith openly ...
and to give account of the hope that we have
in Jesus, your Son, our Lord.
Help us to be hospitable and caring ...
ready to listen to our neighbour's fears and aspirations,
their hopes and longings.

Have your way with them, dear God.
And have your way with us, too.

Amen.

Graham Brookes

From *'Here we are ... send us'*, the Uniting Church's Mission Prayer Handbook 2001.

