
Working For Peace With Justice - The National Council of Churches

an interview with **JOCELYN ARMSTRONG**

Jocelyn Amrstrong has taken up the position of General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Aotearoa. It is the first time that a woman has been appointed to this position, and Jocelyn believes that the time is right for this, as women's perspectives are needed in resolution of the world's problems. Before becoming General Secretary of N.C.C., Jocelyn was a school teacher, involved part-time in N.C.C. work.

For Jocelyn, peace — and that means justice — is the primary issue for the N.C.C. The N.C.C. has proved to be the cutting edge, a point of challenge, between the Churches and the society in which it finds itself. N.C.C. is made up of representatives from Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Associated Churches of Christ, the Salvation Army, Society of Friends, Cook Islands Christian Church, Congregational Greek Orthodox, and Antiochian Orthodox Churches.

The N.C.C. has been deeply involved in peace issues for some time. At its General Meeting in 1981, major issues discussed were Nuclear Testing in the Pacific, Nuclear Free Pacific, the Springbok tour, and N.C.C.'s Programme Against Racism in New Zealand. Resolution from this meeting included active support for the achievement of a Nuclear Free Pacific, initiation of peace studies in churches, New Zealand's discontinuation from any alliances with implications of being part of any nuclear arms system, encouragement for member churches and church groups to join the Peace Movement, to declare their buildings nuclear free zones, and each year to observe the Sunday closest to August 6th as Peace Sunday. Other resolutions included the setting up of a fund to assist in meeting legal costs and fines of Tour protestors, and the preparation of resource kits on the Treaty of Waitangi and the issues involved.

At the beginning of this year, the N.C.C. wrote to church councils around the world, urgently requesting support for New Zealand's nuclear free stand. The document included a copy of the ANZUS Treaty, and eleven clear points explaining our stand, and the sort of action and support that would be helpful. The letter ends "We want to assure you that the N.C.C. in New Zealand will continue to speak out in favour of any policies which will help rid the world of the



scourge of nuclear war, and which will help build peace with justice." Supportive messages have been returned from all around the world; messages like "Your stand is support for us in our continuing struggle — a ray of light in the cloud of fear which has hung over the world for so long." This is an international network which we will continue to contribute to and benefit from.

Christian World Service, which is the aid and development arm of N.C.C., has a peace initiatives cluster, and, building on that work, the N.C.C. is now setting up a Christian Peace Network. Funds are urgently sought to employ 3-4 field workers from November, to move among church people and groups, draw them together and co-ordinate resources. This is to be named Taura Mere I Te Rongomau, Christian Peace Network.

What is it that drives the many people involved in the work of N.C.C.? Jocelyn shares;

"For perhaps the first time, New Zealand has taken a controversial stand in the international scene. As we have to answer for that, people are challenged to put into words the meaning of our lives. While we're used to taking life for granted, we must now begin to articulate the theology which undergirds that positive stand. We need a strong, well thought out position as we seek to provoke the world to look for a way of living beyond deterrence, making the bomb superfluous. This includes looking at economic ties and asking, for instance, what we are doing to develop partnerships with the tiny nations in the Pacific."

Written by Marjorie Pierce

The Ecumenical Movement uses the Greek word Oikoumene meaning "God's whole household." Jocelyn sees Oikoumene being not just the churches, but the whole universe as the household of God. We are required to work towards the unity of that household. This involves the equal partnership of all its members, with their varying understandings and contributions; a partnership in which the partners are mutual, affirming to one another, accountable to one another and know no domination of one by the other. That includes partnerships between women and men, between peoples and nations, between the so-called first world and the third world in new economic systems, and between humanity and the earth herself and her resources. The Ecumenical Movement should be more than just churches getting together. It is a much wider vision involving "the integrity of the whole creation."

For Jocelyn it is important to relate to people, as they work out and share their own experience, their own meaning. Networking is vital, Jocelyn believes, to make us more visible, and stronger in our action to stand against the super-powers and injustice. Networking means not doing things on behalf of people, but getting in behind, empowering each other.

Jocelyn is a feminist, and her involvement in the Women's Movement gives her an holistic approach to her work and life. She is constantly aware of the "web of life", and easily makes connections between all of the justice and peace issues that are facing us in the 1980's. "You cannot deal with one issue without touching other issues. They are interlinked. For example, being aware of and understanding the oppression of women gives us a head start in relating to other oppressions." She is convinced that we must stop separating the nurturing role from the decision-making role, but bring them back together — "the world won't survive, otherwise".

Jocelyn works best with groups of people — yes, it can take more time and effort to organise, but working together is much more fun and creative.

"There is nothing closer to the heart of the gospel than to work for Peace."

As birds are born to fly
so are people
born to be free