

Council of Christians and Jews WA Inc. — Report on AGM for 2021

The CCJWA Annual General Meeting for 2021 was held at Temple David Function Centre at 2:30pm on Sunday 27 February, with over thirty members and guests in attendance.

Chairperson Revd Marie Wilson kept the formal Business Meeting brief, but gave an outline of the Council's activities for the year: Dr Suzanne Boorer's erudite address on "Divine Presence and the Tabernacle" at the AGM; Rabbi David Freilich's presentation on "Jesus: The Observant Jew"; a walking tour — "Jewish Pioneers of Fremantle" — led by Dr Ari Antonovsky; our state branch's contribution to the live-streamed "Open House" portion of the ICCJ conference, comprising a narrated PowerPoint presentation showcasing the past 25 years' activities; a presentation by Archbishop Peter Carnley on "Abraham and Adam"; interfaith evening worship and then supper, with the Winthrop Singers at St Andrew's Parish, Subiaco; and the Commemoration of Kristallnacht held at St George's Cathedral, with a sobering address by Dr Bill Leadbetter on "Christians and Kristallnacht: The brave sermon of Helmut Gollwitzer". Marie also encouraged exploration of the upgraded website, and spoke of the availability of the Interfaith Interface program (*i2i*) involving teams of two — a Jew and a Christian — who will meet with groups to discuss faith matters candidly.

The financial report presented by Mr Robert Lockley showed the healthy status of accounts. The election of the Executive Committee was then dealt with smoothly. In addition to nominations from all members of the 2021 Committee, there were two other nominees, and all were declared elected, giving a total of eleven — four Jewish members and seven Christians.

There being no other business, Marie then introduced Rabbi Kim Ettlinger M.H.L., M.J.E., announcing that as the newly-appointed rabbi of Temple David, she had indicated her willingness to be an Honorary President of the Council. Rabbi Kim commenced her address on "Challenges facing Religious Denominations in the next decade" by sharing a story about a letter to a rabbi, in which the writer lamented that while she looked forward to attending shul, her children were reluctant to do so. She then asked for suggestions as to the date of the letter. While many disparate dates were proposed, she stated that all were correct, because in every generation, parents complain to spiritual leaders about this problem. To illustrate the point, Rabbi Kim gave some religious demographics statistics from the last census, which indicated a marked decline in affiliation with Judaism and Christianity.

The audience was then asked what things people of faith were doing right. Answers included: welcoming all people; modernising; preserving our heritage; good pastoral care; exhibiting a social conscience; and moving towards multi-functional community centres over against single-purpose places of worship.

Answers regarding what we are doing wrong included: not taking our faith seriously enough, and not being strong enough in our beliefs. Rabbi Kim then mentioned several relevant points: the ubiquitousness of devices which will provide instant answers to questions of faith if one's teacher doesn't; that teenagers want to talk and argue, and that if we don't engage

with them we will lose them; that religious leaders are still regarded as representing the establishment; and that congregations' attention span for sermons is now about 8 minutes, rather than 40 minutes as it was 70 years ago.

To sum up, Rabbi Kim said that to keep people involved in the next 10 years, we need to be relevant, exciting, to focus on community, and welcome people in any shape or form. She emphasised that young people care about social justice and climate crisis, and that they are looking to the future. Finally, she referred to Dr Martin Luther King and that we can do what he did. People don't only pray in churches and synagogues. They can pray with their feet.

Rabbi Kim's interactive presentation elicited many comments from the floor, including that a survey last Easter showed that there is a distrust of institutions. A reference to the effect of the pandemic evoked a statement from Rabbi Kim that live-streaming of services had built up the Jewish community, and that while it takes time, effort, and money, it is worthwhile.

At the close of the Q & A session, Mary Marshall expressed thanks to Rabbi Ettlinger for her engaging presentation, saying that her audience now knows what can be done to cope with the challenges we face now and in the next decade. A potted plant was given as a token of appreciation. Refreshments were then served, and fellowship enjoyed by all.

Mary J. Marshall

Honorary Secretary, CCJWA Inc.