The Uniting Church in Australia officially came into being on June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1977 when the Methodist Church, (most of) the Presbyterian and the Congregational Churches agreed to unite to further the cause of the gospel. The term 'uniting' was used to signal a work in progress.

In 1981 a candidate for ordination in the Yarra Valley Presbytery in Victoria informed the Students Committee that she was living in a lesbian relationship. The Students Committee asked the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) for guidance. In 1982 The Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility endorsed a paper written by Rev. Chris Budden named “Sexuality: A gift from God”. The book encouraged the church to stop talking about homosexual people and talk to them. It also challenged the argument that homosexual people must remain celibate.

The issue of the ordination of homosexual people had now been formally raised in the councils of the church. The March ASC meeting advised the Yarra Valley Presbytery ‘that in its view the sexual orientation of a candidate is not and has not been in itself a bar to ordination. A decision on the suitability of a candidate may of course depend among other things on the manner in which his or her sexuality is expressed.’ (Resolution 81.12) From this time on there has been a blurring of the concepts of orientation and behaviour which has been used in the UCA to advance the cause of the normalization of homosexual relationships, the acceptance of practicing homosexual clergy and same-sex marriage.

On the basis of the ASC advice the Yarra Valley Presbytery Students Committee recommended the candidate for ordination in August 1981. The Presbytery then referred the matter to the Victorian Synod Standing Committee, which requested that the ASC reconsider the issue at its September meeting. The ASC re-affirmed resolution 81.12 and explained it further in an expanded statement. (Resolution 82.101)

By March 1983 the ASC became aware of concerns being raised about its position and it established “The Committee on Homosexuality and the Church” to ‘undertake a study of the nature of homosexuality’. This committee submitted the “Interim report of the Committee on Homosexuality and the Church” to the March meeting of ASC in 1984. The Committee was asked to consider whether homosexuals can be members of the UCA.

In 1985, the report “Homosexuality and the Church” was released. The Committee stated its opinion that homosexuality should not in and of itself make a person ineligible for membership, but was divided on the question of ordination. At the 4\textsuperscript{th} Assembly of the UCA which met in July 1985, a motion was proposed to establish that ‘celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage’ is the standard for sexual ethics of the Uniting Church in Australia. After some debate, the Assembly voted that the question not be put. During 1986 over 500 written responses were made to the report “Homosexuality and the Church”. These were summarized in another report in 1987. In 1987 the ASC ‘affirmed that all baptised Christians belong in Christ’s church and are to be welcomed at his table, regardless of their sexual orientation’. Later in the ASC resolution it states: “in the matter of ordination it affirms that the existing procedures provide adequate opportunity for Presbyteries to exercise their responsibility in discipline and pastoral care. The ASC believes that each Presbytery will select candidates and approve for ordination only those whom it believes are suitable for ministry, notes the report
“Homosexuality and the Church: Responses”, helps to clarify some of the issues involved, including that the Church’s expectation that its ministers will adhere to the standards of celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.” (Resolution 87.46) The Report was released in 1998 prior to the 5th Assembly.

At the 5th Assembly which met in July 1988, a motion was presented to establish that ‘celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage’ be the standard of the Uniting Church in Australia. Again, after some debate, the debate was effectively gagged by the successful use of a procedural motion known as “moving the previous question”.

In April 1990 in an article in New Times, the newspaper of the South Australian Synod, a youth worker and member of the Synod Standing Committee was quoted as saying that through faith he has ‘dared to think that God might accept me for being “gay”.’ By June the South Australian Synod Standing Committee was asked: ‘Is it appropriate for the Children, Youth and Young Adults Department to consider the issue of homosexual practice as a valid criterion on which decisions about leadership are made?’ The SA Synod Standing Committee decided that it ‘has been unable to confidently discern the will of God on the issue’. The South Australian Synod meeting was held in October and focused on the issue of homosexuality. It decided not to legislate on the issue, rather to encourage each church council to seek the leading of God in each situation.

In 1991 the ASC released ‘Sexuality: Making Decisions as Christians’ to provide guidance to the church on matters of sexual ethics. There was significant protest about this book from evangelical members of the church. In June a homosexual man from Adelaide applied to candidate for the Ministry of the Word. He had the support of his parish and the presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee. In July at the 6th Assembly a motion calling for ‘celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage’ failed to gain support. The Assembly refused to withdraw the book ‘Sexuality: Making Decisions as Christians’ from sale. The Assembly resolved to create a Task Group on Sexuality to explore the whole area of Christian sexual ethics and bring a report to the 1997 Assembly. Assembly President Rev. Dr D’Arcy Wood wrote a pastoral letter on sexuality, calling on ‘all members of the church to continue to pray and work in a spirit of Christian unity as we address these important issues’. In September the Adelaide North West Presbytery decided to defer the youth worker’s application indefinitely.

It was during this year of controversy that Evangelical Members within the UCA came into being in South Australia. The issue of the ordination of homosexual people had come to fore again and it was obvious to many evangelicals that the agenda was to create a paradigm shift which would make it acceptable for practicing homosexual people to be ordained and to exercise ministry anywhere in the UCA. EMU was formed out of the realization that for too many years, the evangelicals within the UCA had abdicated from their responsibilities in the councils of the church. Now they could see the consequences of their neglect.

In April 1992, Friends of Unity was created in South Australia as a support network and early in 1993 an interim national steering group was established by gay and lesbian Uniting Church members and their friends.

In 1994 the Assembly Task Group holds a Year of Listening to enable the church to discuss issues of sexuality and sexual ethics. In May a three day conference
“Daring to Speak...Daring to Listen”, the first national gathering for gay, lesbian and bisexual people and their friends, families and supporters in the Uniting Church, was held in Adelaide.

In August 1994 a lesbian applied to candidate for the ministry of deacon in Westernport Presbytery (Vic). She was supported by her presbytery but her application was rejected by the Synod Selection Panel. In September the ASC reminded the Church that applications for candidature are to be decided by presbyteries on an individual basis. A homosexual man applied to be a candidate in the Fleurieu Presbytery (SA). He withdrew his application when his congregation adopted a policy to never approve a gay person for nomination. He entered the Adelaide College of Divinity as a private student. A homosexual man applied to candidate for the ministry of the Word in Canberra Region Presbytery (NSW). The Presbytery decided to explore the issues. Another homosexual man applied to candidate for the ministry of the Word and eventually his application was rejected by Maroondah Presbytery (Vic).

In September 1994 the ASC was asked by the Synod of Tasmania to clarify previous resolutions in respect to the application for candidature by homosexual persons. The ASC noted previous resolutions and the Assembly’s reluctance to make a policy decision and stated that presbyteries may choose to take it into account when assessing an applicant’s suitability. The ASC acknowledged that doctrinal matters are among the issues which underlie the question of suitability and acceptance of homosexual persons as candidates. However the ASC was of the view that the Church is not ready to make declarations through the Assembly on the doctrinal matters. The ASC promoted a time of listening, meeting and discussion. (Resolution 94.78.3)

On 16th May 1996 the Assembly Task Group released the Interim Report on Sexuality for discussion. However in a mistake of judgement it chose to release the report to the media prior to making it available to ministers and congregations. What ensued was an unexpected deluge of responses to the Interim Report — more than 8,000 of them. A detailed analysis of responses was commissioned by ASC and completed by February 1997. The responses were overwhelmingly negative (88%) and represented 21000 members of the UCA. The report and its direction were criticized for biblical and theological reasons and for starting with society's changing patterns rather than with of the received Christian tradition. It was also viewed as presenting a very liberal and individualistic view of ethics. The original report, (The Bentley Report) consisting of 22 pages was edited to produce an “Official Report” which was provided to Assembly representative two weeks prior to the meeting of the 8th Assembly. The Bentley report was available on request.

The Interim report on Sexuality made evangelical members within the Uniting Church aware of the reality that they could no longer simply focus on local mission and prompted EMU groups to be formed across Australia. They gathered together and began to organize a coordinated response.

Conversely, supporters of homosexual ordination felt that it was time for the church to engage in a paradigm shift. In June 1996 they held a conference “Daring to Live, Daring to Move On” in Melbourne.
On 9th September a homosexual minister “comes out” in Victoria. On 22nd September a deacon tells the Victorian Synod that she is lesbian and on 23rd September the sole nominee for Moderator fails to receive the 75% vote necessary after the Victorian Synod learns that she is in a same-sex relationship. A special Synod meeting was called in order to elect a moderator.

During 1996 Uniting Church Congregations participated in the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). The survey asked a random sample of attenders whether homosexuals should be accepted as members in the church on the same basis as heterosexuals. It also asked whether they should be appointed to leadership positions. Forty-three per cent believed homosexuals should be accepted as members, whereas 45 per cent did not give unconditional acceptance. Of that 45%, 16% said homosexuals should not be accepted and a further 29% stipulated they should only be accepted if they were non-practicing. These results show little support for homosexuals being appointed to leadership positions. Sixteen per cent of Uniting Church attenders believed homosexuals should be accepted into leadership positions on the same basis as heterosexuals. Over half of the Uniting Church attenders disagreed, with a further 20% agreeing only if the homosexuals were non-practicing. These results were made available to the ASC prior to the 8th Assembly.

At its meeting in 1996, the Queensland Synod resolved to call the 8th Assembly to affirm “that Christ calls and empowers us to be celibate in singleness and faithful in marriage and that homosexual practice is contrary to the teaching of scripture which has been affirmed by the church historically and ecumenically”. The Synod also called the Assembly to determine that self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates or settled in designated ministries, or be appointed to any position of leadership and that ceremonies that celebrate homosexual relationships shall not be conducted by Ministers of the Uniting Church, nor held in Uniting Churches. EMU Queensland organized a petition supporting the Synod’s proposal and asked the Assembly to adopt the resolutions of the Queensland Synod as the official position, practice and teaching of the Uniting Church in Australia. 7250 people signed the petition which was delivered to the 8th Assembly and it was placed in a prominent position at the front of the theatre.

The Assembly Task Group released its final report “Uniting Sexuality and Faith” on 11th May 1997, again many people were concerned by its contents.

Debate on the Task Group’s report “Uniting Sexuality and Faith” began 6th July at the 8th Assembly held in Perth. What followed was a complex process of consensus decision making which left people in what the President John Mavor described as the “messy middle” “amid tension and paradox”. The report “Uniting Sexuality and Faith”, suggested "right relationships" as the appropriate sexual ethic for all church members, including ministers. “Right relationships”, were defined as loving, committed, non-promiscuous, non-exploitative and genuine relationships between partners, which could be heterosexual or homosexual in nature. The discussion was heated and emotional. The Assembly Director of Mission publicly disclosed she was a lesbian and several other Assembly members declared their homosexuality. There were numerous contrary proposals. The United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) felt that it could not continue to participate in the discussion. Migrant-ethnic representatives complained of a lack of consultation. Some business was conducted in a closed session.
The UAICC and migrant ethnic representatives were heard speaking the words that evangelicals had been saying, but they could not be ignored in a church that prides itself as multicultural and for its relationship with indigenous and migrant ethnic people. The relentless push for homosexual ordination was temporarily halted. The evangelicals at Assembly would have welcomed a debate based on scriptural and theological argument.

The Assembly ended with the acceptance of a proposal from Synod Moderators. Their proposal committed the Church to a continuing dialogue and acknowledged people’s disappointment and personal pain, and to remain in covenantal relationship with the UAICC. The 8th Assembly noted previous decisions of the Assembly Standing Committee and that these policies remained in place. It was also decided not to proceed with the remaining proposals relating to sexuality except for proposal 51; and requested former Presidents Ron Wilson, D’Arcy Wood and Jill Tabart to consider how the Assembly might deal with the outstanding issues relating to sexuality following this Assembly, and report with recommendations to the Standing Committee.

Across Australia EMU began to grow in response to the realization that the sexuality debate was symptomatic of a departure from Biblical truth. Many people began to feel as if the UCA’s denominational structures had been hijacked by those who reject an informed Biblical position on matters of life and faith. The UCA was seen as slipping into a chasm of liberalism, universalism, humanism and relativism.

Over 1000 people attended Post Assembly meetings in July and August which were called by EMU. These meetings disseminated information, encouraged recruitment and looked towards providing a strategic and coordinated response.

The First National Evangelical Summit within the Uniting Church took place at Vision Valley Conference Centre, Sydney, from 21st to 22nd August 1997. It was initiated by Rev. Dr Gordon Moyes who invited leaders from 40 key evangelical and charismatic churches from across Australia as well as leaders from numerous organizations from within the Uniting Church. The summit pointed out that the UCA was suffering because of a departure from the authority of scripture and called evangelicals and charismatics to a continuing and active role in the life of the UCA. It also called for freedom of choice of accredited theological colleges for candidates for ministry. It also called for a Covenanting or Confessing movement.

The Uniting Church in Australia’s Rev Dr Dorothy McRae-McMahon resigned from her Assembly position as National Director for Mission. The ASC accepted her resignation. The Sydney Morning Herald 2nd September reported her reason to be; “that the focus on sexuality was affecting the reputation of the Church.” The Standing committee also acknowledged complaints about the General Secretary, the Rev Gregor Henderson, in relation to his support for Ms McRae-McMahon. The ASC acknowledged that a formal complaint had been made against her and was being heard through the church’s confidential processes. The complaint was made by Rev Dr Glouster Udy.

On 17th - 18th September 97 the National Council of EMU met in Victoria and among other things it resolved to apologize to all migrant ethnic and Aboriginal and Islander people of the Uniting Church who have felt shame and embarrassment within their cultures because of the failure of the Uniting Church to affirm Biblical sexual standards. EMU resolved to work faithfully within the UCA for a further three years with the goal of
EMU’s INvolvement in the sexuality debate: the story so far

Helping to lead the Church in constant reform under His word despite revisionist distortion of the orthodox understanding of Scripture and Christian history. The Council also explored the Confessing Church model which had been developed within the United Methodist Church (USA). Rev Robert Iles retires as National Chair of EMU and Rev Ian Weeks is appointed to this role.

EMU noted a significant loss of congregations, UCA membership and ministerial resignations as a result of the Assembly’s decision.

During the 1997 NSW Synod, a proposal was presented by Rev Stephen Estherby asking the Synod to request that Eastside Parish not enter a float in the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The proposers acknowledged the genuine desire of the parish to show pastoral care to gay and lesbian people who feel hurt and alienated but also warned of the pain, hurt and embarrassment that the entry of a float would cause to many in the Christian community and asked the organizers to not continue for these pastoral reasons.

Rev Rod Pattenden of the Eastside Parish assured the Synod that the float was not being entered by the Eastside Parish but by a group of gay and lesbian members of the Uniting Church and their supporters from different congregations. He stated that the organising committee for the float was examining the various ramifications of entering such a float.

Following lengthy discussions, including several alternative proposals and one adjournment, and an assurance to the Synod that the concerns which had been expressed about the proposed entry of the float would be conveyed to the organizers of the float, the Synod permitted the sponsors of the original proposal to withdraw the proposal. Rev Rod Pattenden agreed to take these comments back to the organising committee.

In Perth a group of members chose to march behind a Uniting Church banner in the October Gay Pride March. This resulted in a Newspaper advertisement in The West Australian entitled “Will the real Uniting Church stand up?” It protested the act of a relatively small, but militant group trying to push the UCA with respect to sexuality.

On 23 December 1997 the NSW Moderator wrote to Rev Dr Udy (regarding the complaint against Rev Dr Dorothy McRae-McMahon), “The committee is satisfied that the matter can not be dealt with by counseling. The committee however acknowledges the importance of the issues raised in the complaint, however it believes they are beyond the mandate given to the Committee for discipline and that the Committee for discipline is not the appropriate platform for determination of the matters. Accordingly, the complaint is not referred to the Committee for discipline.”

The February edition of Assembly Update reported: “A group of Uniting Church Members is going ahead with plans to enter a float in the parade which concludes the month long Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival in Sydney 28 February.” To many this sounded like the announcement of a fait accompli. “Synod and Assembly leaders have expressed reservations about the plans regarding the Mardi Gras participation as less than helpful to the ongoing debate in the church.”
EMU’s INVOLVEMENT IN THE SEXUALITY DEBATE: THE STORY SO FAR

The Second National Evangelical Summit was held at High Street Road Uniting Church, Mount Waverley, Victoria, from 20th to 21st February 1998. This meeting received a number of short submissions regarding the direction of the Uniting Church and expressed its intent to form a Confessing movement within the UCA.

Rev Dorothy McRae McMahon opened the month long Mardi Gras festival on steps of the Opera House. About 100 UCA people participated along with the float in the Parade. A former Moderator of NSW Rev Tony Chi, Rev Ron Brookman and Rev Alan Robinson organized two thirds of a page advertisement in the Daily Telegraph 28th February 1998. Over one hundred parishes and congregations, 30 groups and over 100 ministers added their names to a simple public statement.

“We of the Uniting Church in Australia affirm the value of every person in God’s eyes. We welcome at all times everyone who wishes to join our congregations in worship and fellowship. We accept as the guide for all our behaviour the teachings of the Bible and seek to live our lives accordingly. Therefore it is with regret that we disagree with those participate as Uniting Church persons in the Mardi Gras. We see this as a festival which demeans sexuality and which encourages and celebrates promiscuous behaviour, at great cost to our city and nation.”

EMU members joined with St. Michael’s Anglican (the only Church on the Mardi Gras route) and Newtown Mission in an outreach to spectators with the Gospel. They established a Drop In centre for the night of the parade, had a live band perform worship music for the two hours that spectators waited for the parade. A prayer team prayed for every participant in the parade. The lonely, bewildered, upset, disillusioned and hurting were invited to the Drop In centre for coffee and supper.

The three former Presidents (Ron Wilson, D’Arcy Wood and Jill Tabart) reported to the March meeting of the ASC. The resolutions concluded that to engage in a further process of studying and reporting on sexuality was not likely to be productive and resolved not to pursue a search for consensus on the differing attitudes within the church regarding homosexuality and the participation of homosexual persons in leadership positions. EMU responded to the ASC. EMU believed it was a time when the church needed decisive leadership and was disappointed that the ASC had failed to provide that leadership. The UCA was left stuck in the “messy middle” singing the unconvincing anthem “Unity in Diversity” while awaiting re-education through a growing revision of scriptural interpretation.

During 1998 EMU groups made a concerted effort to promote conferences to equip evangelicals and encourage personal engagement with the processes and structures of the UCA to encourage reform. The EMU National Consultation held in Adelaide November 1998 provided a sounding board for many frustrated people who had lost confidence in Assembly Leadership. Many people reported their feeling that Assembly Leadership creates an impression of listening to evangelical concerns whilst at the same time moving the Uniting Church away from its historical and orthodox roots. The meeting resolved to create an Association of Evangelical Congregations within the Uniting Church (AEC). The intention was to establish a movement with a confession.

The General Secretary acted quickly and effectively in managing the situation by listening to and smiling at the EMU representatives who met with him. The author of this
article was one of those representatives. In the coming months we were dazzled by the smoke and mirrors of ASC resolutions and a report from the Church Polity Reference Committee and in a mistake of judgment we listened to the request of the ASC not to promote the AEC any further and lost the moment and our momentum.

The Presbytery of Maribyrnong Valley (Vic) 20th July stated that ‘this Presbytery believes that the fact that a person is living in a stable committed same-gender sexual relationship is not a bar to ordination’.

In November the ASC advised all Presbyteries that “it is not helpful for them to make general statements of principle on patterns of sexual behaviour and their implication for ordination”.

On 25th July 1998, an official hearing commenced in Western Australia. Rev. Bill Pickering was called before the Synod Committee for Disciple to answer five charges after speaking out publicly to the Sunday Times against participation in the October 1997 Gay Pride March. He was admonished and the Moderator Rev John Dunn made a statement in Western Impact of 21st August that; “Only the Moderator is able to make any public statement.”

On 27 February 1999 Uniting Church members marched in the Mardi Gras for the second time, again without the UCA logo, under the banner of “embracing diversity”. EMU members continued in the outreach to spectators. EMU was criticized by its membership for not doing enough in response to UCA involvement in the Mardi Gras.

During 1999 the President Rev John Mavor proposed “Moving Ahead with Diversity Retreats”. These had a number of stated aims but the hope was to model how people who hold different beliefs, even different world views can work and worship together. EMU officially declined to attend these retreats however it responded to the National Diversity Retreat Statement. Rev Ian Weeks National Chair of EMU who attended the 23-25 July retreat held in Sydney (on his own behalf as did other members of EMU) reported: “It was the first time I can recall any ‘official” gathering recognizing that there are, in the Uniting Church, mutually exclusive views regarding homosexuality; views that can not be reconciled.”

In December 1999 a certified candidate living in a same-sex relationship failed to receive the two-thirds support needed in Maribyrnong Valley Presbytery to be approved for ordination.

On 26th February 2000 Uniting Church members march in the Mardi Gras for the third year. EMU members joined in the outreach to spectators. EMU promotes a petition to the Australian Broadcasting Association against broadcasting Mardi Gras and encourages members to protest to major sponsors.

Cardinal Edward Clancy and Archbishop Harry Goodhew express their view that Mardi Gras “is an exercise in gross exhibitionism that promotes a homosexual lifestyle, and does not merit our presence or support.” (Sydney Morning Herald 24th February)

Rev Ian Weeks National Chair of EMU urged the NSW Moderator David Manton to join the bishops in their stand reminding him that the majority of Uniting Church members
stand with them in saying no to adultery, fornication, and sexual promiscuity, in all its forms. He called UCA leadership to make the same affirmation.

On 9-12th June the third ‘Daring Gathering’ “Living to Liberate” is held in Adelaide.

In July the 9th Assembly approved a ‘Statement on Unity and Diversity’ (00.25.03) and asks all councils of the church to deal effectively and consistently with instances of harassment and vilification (00.25.04), but decided not to consider any other proposals on sexuality.

A woman living in a same-sex relationship was ordained into a Western Australian Synod placement as Mission Consultant, after approval from both her presbytery and the WA Synod.

November 2000 Rev Ian Weeks retires as National Chair of EMU and Mrs Mary Hawkes was unanimously appointed by National Executive of EMU.

February 2001 Uniting Church members marched in Mardi Gras for a fourth year. EMU members continued in the outreach to spectators.

A forum was organized at the initiative of the President of the Uniting Church entitled Reclaiming the Catholic, Apostolic and Reformed Faith on 24-26th April 2001. From the title it may be deduced that the President was concerned that the UCA may have moved from its Catholic, Apostolic and Reformed Faith.

In 2001 EMU focused on providing Biblical Evangelical Resources and launched a $10000 Evangelical Scholarship.

Uniting Church members march in Mardi Gras for the fifth year February 2002 7-10 June: Daring to Celebrate (the fifth ‘Daring Gathering’) is held in Melbourne, under the auspices of the Justice and International Mission Unit, Synod of Victoria.

EMU members Walter and Katherine Abetz edit “Swimming Between the Flags: Reflections on the Basis of Union.” EMU produces resources on Women in Ministry, Stem Cell Research and Education. EMU scholarship is awarded to Rev Ian Robinson.

In November 2002, Rev Dr Chris Budden presented to the ASC, a paper entitled, “Doctrine, Theology and Ethics, and the Role of Assembly” in which he argued that Assembly has determining authority over doctrine, and not over theology and ethics. He concedes in his concluding paragraph, that “The Assembly will only make determinations when certain behaviour threatens the nature of the UCA as Church or undermines the doctrines of the church.”

“One of the century’s most remarkable churchmen and one of the chief architects behind the Uniting Church coming into being”, former Uniting Church General Secretary, UCA President and member of EMU, Rev Winston O’Reilly died 19th January 2000

29th January 2003 theologian, broadcaster, evangelist and member of EMU, Rev Dr Sir Alan Walker died.
Uniting Church members march in Mardi Gras for the sixth year February 2003.

The sexuality issue is raised again as the 10th Assembly approaches. EMU hoped for a decision so that its members would know where they stand and what decision they should make. EMU was invited to participate in a consultation that was held on 3rd June in Adelaide. The purpose was to discuss with Uniting Network, UAICC, members of the ethnic churches and “middle of the road people” a possible process for the Assembly to address the sexuality issue. EMU agreed to attend hoping to help the church work towards a decision. However in retrospect it appears that the ASC Task group had come to the meeting with the idea that, being able to live with two polarized viewpoints, which are mutually exclusive, is strength. It seemed the task group was seeking a particular outcome which invited people to embrace diversity and accept one another’s differences. EMU disagreed with and warned against the consequences of such a course of action. EMU communicated its disagreement with the group’s final resolution to the ASC, in writing.

The Rev. Dr Gloster Udy died 4th May 2003. He was an extraordinary man and an encourager, supporter, warrior and prayerful member of EMU.

In June 2003 the Mt Lofty Presbytery (SA) refused to approve a decision of a Joint Nominating Committee with regard to a placement because the minister lived in a same-sex relationship.

The 10th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) was held in Melbourne in July 2003. A proposal entitled ‘Membership, Ministry and Sexuality’ was brought to the Assembly. The Assembly was assured that this proposal would change nothing, merely make statements about our current practice, and it was designed to smooth over the differences that exist in the UCA regarding sexuality. The motion was passed easily by formal vote. However those who voted against it were all evangelicals and these people, who included the Aboriginal Christian Congress, were deeply alarmed at what the proposal allowed. The Assembly decided not to refer its decision to the Councils of the Church for concurrence (as it is obliged to do on issues which are vital to the life of the Church) on the basis of advice that there was no need because the decision didn’t change anything.

There was an outcry, mass meetings were held across Australia. A petition was circulated which protested the Assembly’s decision and requested that the issues raised in Resolution 84 of the 10th Assembly in Melbourne be referred to the Councils of the Church for concurrence. The ASC disregarded this petition which over 20,000 people signed and which represented the opinion of members in 500 congregations. The signatures were collected by evangelical members within the UCA (EMU) over a period of two weeks. These were hand delivered by the author of this article to the ASC on 22nd August. Gregor Henderson was shocked at the number of signatures when he first saw them. (Three years later at the opening service of the 11th Assembly 2006 when he was installed as President he took the opportunity in his sermon to chastise the signatories of the petition for their action. Later when the offence he had caused was pointed out to him he chose not to modify, retract or apologize for his statements.) At the ASC meeting in August 2003 the members of the ASC set a questionable precedent by amending the wording of Res 84 which had been passed by a full meeting of the Assembly. These amendments were insufficient to calm the troubled waters of the UCA.
Over time there has been a disturbing shift in interpretation with regards to the meaning of 'homosexual orientation'. Now it seems to necessarily include 'homosexual practice'. This change in institutional understanding has come through the interpretation of a small group rather than the properly constituted processes of the church. It is the acceptance of this new interpretation in the UCA which allows some people to see no problem with ordaining practicing homosexuals.

Resolution 84 infers that it is alright for people in the Church to hold mutually exclusive views on same issues using Scripture. Christ is not divided and neither is his Word open to mutually exclusive interpretations. By their refusal to refer their decision for concurrence, Assembly, ASC and Assembly Officers either do not understand or want to accept the opinion of the vast majority of members of the UCA. This, clearly, is not acceptable.

After two unsuccessful meetings between EMU representatives and Assembly Officers and the recognition that the meetings EMU called in most of the capital cities were attracting people from a much wider sphere than EMU, it was decided to call a national summit to discuss the way forward. This historic event was held in Sydney from September 22-24, and 'The Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church' was formed. There were 73 people at the Summit representing every State and Territory. EMU members numbered 34 were and 39 were not EMU-members. They included lay pastors, ministers, theological students, members of migrant ethnic congregations and a representative of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

While our unity in Christ was very real, three different approaches emerged in response to the increasingly liberal climate of the Uniting Church. These three strands developed:

Firstly, those who wished to stay and work wholeheartedly for change within the current structures. They decided to review their position from time to time. Secondly, those who wanted to stay in the Uniting Church in Australia but move towards parallel structures to bring about change. They too would review their position from time to time. Thirdly, those who felt they had to leave the current structures of the UCA. The hope was that they remain members of the Alliance, this sadly proved to be an unrealistic expectation.

At its inception it was envisaged that individuals, congregations and even Presbyteries or Synods could choose to belong to the Alliance. The groups within the Reforming Alliance were to be flexible and help people or councils to move from one group to the other as necessary. They were to function simultaneously.

The summit resulted in a creative response to the spiritual malaise of the Uniting Church that avoided a mass exodus by orthodox/evangelical Christians at that point in time. The first action of the Alliance under the leadership of the Interim Chair Rev Rosemary Broadstock was to visit the Assembly officers with the outcomes of the summit. The second was to survey each council of the Uniting Church in Australia and as many individual members as possible, to ascertain their position with regard to the decisions of the Assembly and the ordination/settlement of practicing homosexual people.

This survey was distributed in October including translations for the benefit of migrant and ethnic congregations. On Friday 29th January the Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church released the results of a recent survey of over 27000 Uniting Church attenders. The survey, conducted late 2003 showed the following results:
1. Should a commitment to celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage be a requirement for those exercising leadership in the UC? Yes 88.6%, no 6.3%, undecided 3.8%, no answer 1.3%.
2. Should people living in a same gender sexual relationship be ordained in the UC? Yes 6.5%, no 88.8%, undecided 4.0%, no answer 0.7%.
3. Is the ordination of people living in a same gender sexual relationship an issue on which members of the UC should be directly consulted? Yes 87.6%, no 7.7%, and undecided 3.5%, no answer 1.2%.

The results were consistent with previous research and showed that 88% of ordinary church attenders in over 1450 congregations have a conservative viewpoint with regards to sexuality, leadership and ordination. More than 87% of those who were surveyed believe that the National Assembly of the Uniting Church should take their opinion into consideration. Using estimates of adult attendance derived from 1996 NCLS and allowing for a 10% decline simply through aging it is estimated that there are no more 106,000 attenders in the UCA on any Sunday. This means that the sample of this survey is close to a quarter of weekly attendance.

RA warned Assembly Officers that a misreading, misinterpretation or a conscious decision to ignore the reality and significance of these results by Assembly leaders could lead to the continued exodus from the Uniting Church of whole congregations, parts of congregations and the leakage of many faithful Christians to other churches.

Regrettably, many UC leaders and ministers prevented the survey being carried out or dissuaded individuals and congregations from being involved.

Such was the sense of dissatisfaction in the Queensland Synod with the 10th Assembly’s decision that the Moderator called special Synod meeting on 7th-8th November. It was convened at the request of all state presbyteries. Vital resolutions were passed at this meeting. Firstly, Queensland Synod’s 1991 and 1996 statements were affirmed. Secondly, QLD Council of Synod’s previous decision and affirmed that R84 is a matter vital to the church in Queensland. The Queensland Synod called for the Assembly to seek concurrence with the other Councils of the church.

In a letter dated November 17th 2003 UCA President Rev Dr Dean Drayton wrote: (The author has underlined some things he finds interesting)

As a body the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) carefully and prayerfully considered the pastoral responses needed to take our church forward. We believe we have developed a genuine road map to the next Assembly, so that people are able to take part in the process of discerning the doctrine of the church with regard to people in committed, same-gender relationships being in leadership positions. While the polity of the Church has always meant that a Presbytery might ordain such a person, the ASC has heard the voice of the church indicating that it wants this matter to be addressed by the Assembly itself.

In essence we have set up a three-step process that will allow the breadth of the church to be heard on this matter and, through our presbyteries and Synods, prepare for decisions on this issue for the 2006 Assembly, if it sees fit.
The process is:

1. Refer Assembly minute 03.12.04 as varied by ASC minute 03.69 (proposal 84) to congregations and presbyteries for their responses by 30 April 2004;
2. Establish a year-long period of Biblical and theological study where members and councils of the church can seek to discern God’s will on these matters;

The request for responses from Councils and Congregations to Assembly Minute 03.12.04, and additional information, will come under separate cover early in the new year. We feel it is very important for our whole church to engage in this matter at a doctrinal level, as the basis of working towards a final resolution at a future Assembly.

The question is, Did the road map take us where it promised and was it followed?

Both RA and EMU produced papers for inclusion in Assembly’s Document Sexuality and Leadership in the Uniting Church.

On 29th November 2003 RA held a conference in Melbourne – The Other Side of 84.

Early in 2004 Rev Dr Max Champion was appointed as Chair of RA. A confessional statement was drawn up for RA along with a statement of purpose. Membership of the Alliance was open to individuals and any council of the UCA which is in agreement with the Confessional Statement and Purpose of the Alliance and adheres to the Basis of Union and the creeds and statements which are a part of the Basis.

The creation of the Alliance was a move to help bring about much needed reform. EMU was an integral part of RA and our paths began to converge as the relationship grew in strength and common experience. EMU provided logistical support, encouraged its members to join RA. EMU allowed RA to take the lead role to secure new support and in the hope that EMU could eventually merge with RA. EMU also undertook some particular tasks for RA.

In South Australia controversy surrounding R84 prompted some members of EMU SA to attempt to establish a non-geographical presbytery which held to an orthodox understanding of sexuality. The Proposed Orthodox Presbytery was inaugurated at Glenunga on 7th May 2004. This encouraged the Synod to adopt a new structure in South Australia when also presbyteries were amalgamated into the Presbytery of South Australia and new system of networks was instituted. These networks use specific memorandums of understanding which describe the mission and ethos of each network.

RA held its first national conference 15th -17th July in Brisbane 2004. RA began its planning for the 11th Assembly. The conference resolved that if orthodox Christian reform does not occur at the 2006 Assembly RA would facilitate an amicable separation from the UCA. RA and EMU began to explore exit strategies which would be discussed at the RA National conference the following year.
As a result of widespread complaints about UCA Decision Making, EMU member Rev Stephen Estherby brought a motion to the 2004 NSW Synod asking for a review of the Consensus Decision Making Process in the NSW Synod – the motion was soundly defeated.

RA sought answers from the ASC November meeting to ten questions. RA wanted to know from the ASC - Will you prevent Schism? RA reported the reply of the Assembly General Secretary. The letter showed the ASC - to have acted properly according to the church’s rules and regulations, and it wants to retain every group in the Church by a process of discussion and deferral of decisions.

RA reaches 1500 individual members of RA and the 170 congregations.

By this time Mrs Mary Hawkes National Chair of EMU had been told by the President-Elect Gregor Henderson that it is most unlikely that the ASC will do anything to bring sexuality and leadership to the 11th Assembly in 2006. The confident talk about a “roadmap” had ceased.

RA Executive begins to work towards bringing a motion on sexuality to the 11th Assembly.

RA publishes the news that the official church journals have studiously avoided reporting. It releases Dr Howard Bradbury’s research which documents the high rate of loss of individual members, ministers and their congregations as a result of the sexuality issue. Conservative research, current in April 2005 indicated that since the 1997 Perth Assembly 6500 individuals, 43 ministers had left the UCA. Splits have occurred in over 110 congregations with an average loss of 50 members. Despite the claims by UCA officials that these figures are exaggerated, they were in fact conservative. The losses continue to grow. Howard and Ruth Bradbury left with other members of Reid Uniting in Canberra, in 2006 the oldest Uniting Church congregation in Canberra subsequently closed.

On July 12th – 14th RA holds its second National Conference “Reformation or Schism – The Stark Choice Facing the Uniting Church”. Rev Max Champion began the conference with his opening address, “Agenda for a Confessing Church.” The conference resolved to seek legal advice on R84, Church Property and to challenge the Assembly to make assemblies more representative of church membership. The meeting adopted the RA Proposal on sexuality and it was decided to encourage congregations to urge presbyteries to send the motion to Assembly for decision. The meeting supported Rev Lu Senituli and Rev Hedley Fihaki to take the RA proposal along with their multi-cultural statement to the Queensland Synod in September. Discussions were also had about a variety of exit strategies. There was a strong desire to remain in the UCA with integrity if possible.

Some of the EMU executive met after the conference for dinner. Mary Hawkes announced that she would be standing down as EMU National Chair. Mary performed a wonderful service to us all. Mary and Rev Nick Hawkes heard God’s call and resigned from the Uniting Church on the 22nd August 2005. EMU National Executive met at Bulli during August to appoint a new National Chair and the author, Rev Stephen Estherby was unanimously elected. EMU National warned the ASC that if the Assembly did not
return to orthodox teaching with regards to sexuality and leadership at the 11th Assembly. EMU would no longer encourage people to continue to work within existing structures of the UCA. EMU’s website was redeveloped; EMU reengaged with the media and began a program of legislative change to ensure property justice.

In a miraculous event during the Queensland Synod meeting the RA proposal was passed by a secret ballot, 181 in favor to 114 against. The proposal was on its way to Assembly. The rest of the story of this proposal and the 11th Assembly is thoroughly covered by Peter Bentley’s articles on the website RA. EMU members played a significant role in the debate and in the defense of the Gospel.

Both EMU and RA attended the Assembly with the hope that the RA proposal would be properly debated and the sexuality issues would be addressed. They had written asking for assurances of the Assembly that they would be. We knew what the outcome of the Assembly was likely to be and we had planned for that outcome. The EMU Executive had met on two occasions with the RA Executive and together they developed a contingency plan which included the Proposed Charter of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. We had decided that we were going to try and turn the UCA around by becoming a confessing movement that enacts change. These meetings also decided that EMU and RA should merge into the new Assembly of Confessing Congregations. Hopefully we will find ourselves as a new wine in a new wineskin.