

RA 11th Assembly E-News 6: Tuesday 11th July 2006

Dear Friends

Update on Sexuality Debate

A final decision was made this morning. This decision was made by formal majority decision making – the numbers initially looked like about 10% voted against (comment by the President).

The suggested helpful part of the original Dutney proposal is underlined:

To acknowledge that Assembly members are not of one mind regarding the issue of the acceptance into the specified ministries of those who living in committed same gender relationships. Some members of the Assembly adhere to the traditional teaching and practice of Reformed and Evangelical churches in this matter, while others believe that God may be leading us to a different understanding and practice. (editorial underline). Therefore and not withstanding the hope of many in the Church, the 11th Assembly is not prepared to exercise its determining authority in this matter.

This suggested proposal was effectively neutered during the facilitation process and the plenary session and the result can be seen at 5 (a, b,c),

Note: A count was taken, but since Congress was not present, the President said he was not going to announce the ballot as he wanted to ask Congress if they would like the opportunity to be included in the count. If they agreed then a further vote would be taken after morning tea. After morning tea the President reported that the Congress wanted to be included in the count, and a new count was taken just after 11 am.

The ballot was 173 FOR – 48 AGAINST

Resolution 108 is essentially a confirmation of Resolution 84, but also a strengthening of the direction of Resolution 84, and clearly illustrates the role and mind of the Assembly today. Please see the Assembly website for the official transcript. A copy is included below in the interests of information (note – this is from the version handed out at the end of the Assembly)

(Resolution 108)**SEXUALITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA****The Assembly resolved:****Preamble**

In the struggle to be the Uniting Church in Australia, we affirm that our unity is our oneness in Jesus Christ; we acknowledge a variety of theological perspectives and biblical understandings which we maintain in tension within our life as a church, recognising that variety is a gift to the Church which allows most people to find a spiritual home amongst our many congregations and faith communities.

1. To acknowledge and lament that even though the decision of the 10th Assembly regarding Sexuality and Leadership (Assembly Minute 03.12.04, varied by Assembly Standing Committee Minute 03.69.03) was made prayerfully and in good faith and according to UCA polity, it was a catalyst for the deep concern and disquiet present in some parts of the UCA.
2. To express its regret that following the 10th Assembly there were some faithful ministers and members of the church who believed that because of the decision of the 10th Assembly regarding Sexuality and Leadership (Assembly Minute 03.12.04, varied by Assembly Standing Committee Minute 03.69.03) they had no option but to withdraw from the Uniting Church altogether.
3. To express its regret that faithful Christian gay and lesbian people, on whose lives the Assembly deliberations have impacted, have continued to experience pain in our church.
4. To declare that the matter of Sexuality and Leadership is at heart a matter of faith and concerns our humanity in Christ.

The 11th Assembly

5. To acknowledge:
 - a) that Assembly members are not of one mind regarding the issue of the acceptance into the specified ministries of those living in committed same gender relationships; and

b) that some members of the Assembly adhere to traditional teaching and practice of Reformed and Evangelical churches in this matter, while others who also adhere to the Reformed and Evangelical tradition believe that God may be leading this tradition to a different understanding and practice;

and therefore, notwithstanding the hopes of many in the Church, the 11th Assembly having prayerfully sought to discern God's will and after much deliberation is not prepared to exercise its determining responsibility in this matter.

The Next Steps

6. Pursuant to Clauses [sic] 38 of the Constitution, to advise Synods and Presbyteries;

a) that congregations who resolve that they are unable in conscience to receive into ministry placement a person living in a committed same-gender relationship, shall not be compelled to do so; and

b) to respect the decision of a congregation indicating its willingness to consider calling a minister in a committed same-gender sexual relationship.

7. To encourage Congregations:

a) to be aware that within many Congregations there is a diversity of belief on matters of sexuality and leadership and that some members do not feel free to express their beliefs:

b) to become safe communities where people may hold diverse beliefs on these matters and work together as the Body of Christ; and

c) to recognise that the possibility of living with difference is a gift which Christ offers to the world.

8. To encourage the whole church

a) to commit itself to continue to grapple with the implications of the gospel of God's grace for our humanity, the church's life, and participation in God's mission in the world;

b) to call on all members of the church who hold different views to work at living together in peace as members of the Body of Christ; and

c) to hope, pray and work for that common mind in faith which is Jesus Christ's gift and will.

9. To request the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine to engage in further work that assists the Church in our ongoing consideration of the theological diversity of the Church on this issue and to authorise the Assembly Standing Committee to determine the terms of reference for such work.

10. To acknowledge

a) that the Uniting Church is committed "to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church", and

b) that Christ continues to feed us with word and sacrament as we wait on God's living Word; and to call the Uniting Church to re-commit itself to its primary purpose of "worship, witness and service" (Quotes are from the Basis of Union, Paragraph 1)

11. To request that the President consult with the Moderators in relation to a pastoral letter to the whole church.

Note: The contents of the pastoral letter may include

- a) The matters referred to in the preamble
- b) The contents of this resolution
- c) A reflection of the nature and spirit of the 11th Assembly discussions and contributions from the UAICC and Multicultural congregations
- d) The longing of the 11th Assembly for the day when those Christians who in conscience left congregations are reconciled with those Christians who remain within the UCA, and that we may unite in faith, hope and love.