



Assembly of
Confessing Congregations
of the Uniting Church in Australia

Theological Declaration

**Adopted at meeting of the ACC
National Council on 12 August 2008**

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), make this declaration at a time when mainline denominations are declining through their failure to uphold the historic and apostolic faith committed to the church. We believe they have surrendered to our culture's values and the lure of alien gospels.

We pray that the UCA will resist captivity to cultural forces by upholding the apostolic faith defined in its own Basis of Union. We affirm the Basis of Union as the UCA's foundational document. Our constant desire is the reform, renewal and reconciliation of the whole church under the Word of God.

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1. The gospel as public truth

The church confesses that in Jesus Christ God has entered into the world. Through the prophets God promised Israel that he would gather all nations to himself, fulfilling this promise by ending the old social order and bringing into being a new order. We confess that, in his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus Christ embodies the renewed world as a sign of hope for all humanity. Those who follow Christ participate in this newness of life while awaiting its full consummation. We therefore declare God's truth in Jesus Christ as the judgment and renewal of communal life. To this end we believe the church is commissioned to remind the world that it is called to glorify God and embody God's purpose for humankind. In declaring the public reality of God's new order we reject the following notions:

- that Christianity is merely a system of private values;
- that Christianity is merely one among many forms of spirituality;
- that Christians and Christian communities have the right to determine the nature of truth apart from their relationship to God in Christ;
- that human sexuality can be determined by individuals in contradiction to the biblical witness of humankind's creation as male and female in the image of God; and
- that Christians should desist from public discussion about war and peace, the plight of refugees, euthanasia, abortion, global warming, and other significant issues.

2. The One whom we confess

We confess Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father. He is the incarnate Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, attested by the Spirit in prophetic and apostolic witness as Israel's Messiah, and the one

Lord and Saviour of the world. He fulfils God's promises to Israel and, as Word and Sacrament, orders the life of the church for the sake of all humankind.

In his life and death Jesus Christ presented to his heavenly Father atonement for sin and the one complete, perfect offering of obedience and worship which the Father had always sought but which humankind had persistently failed to offer. He did this in our flesh and blood, and in our stead and on our behalf. Accordingly for our sake the Father, through the Spirit, raised him from the dead. The gospel is thus the word of new life for all humankind, whom the Son represented in his death and resurrection.

Therefore we rejoice in the triune God of love and confess anew the centrality of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

We confess that God's coming in Jesus Christ alone is the answer to human despair and futility. For God, in the risen, crucified One, has judged our human brokenness and alienation and rebellion against God; and has delivered us into the freedom and love of the Holy Trinity. In Christ history is transformed and humankind forgiven.

Therefore, baptised into the life of Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, our lives are transformed.

We believe no human disorder lies outside the inclusive redemption completed in Christ through the sanctifying love of the triune God, who is the world's future. What we and the creation shall be has already taken place in Christ who is the consummation of all things. Only as people of Christ can we anticipate the future and proclaim the hope of Christ's reconciliation to the world.

Therefore we reject any notion that Jesus Christ is one sage among others in human history, or that the Christian faith is simply one path among others to the 'god behind all gods'.

3. The confession of the church: the trinitarian faith

The unity of the church is founded on the confession of one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. As a consequence of the cross of Christ, the Father, through the Son, has poured out the promised Holy Spirit on the church. We are thus enabled, through the Spirit, to participate in the Son's worship of the Father.

Christ has sealed his undying love for the church in the visible signs of baptism and Holy Communion which, with the Word, are the promised means of conveying and sustaining the new life in the Spirit. In her worship and communion with the Trinity the church receives the apostolic commission to make disciples of all nations.

The mission of the Trinity is to embrace all things through the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The salvation of persons takes place within the scope of God's plan for the world.

In adherence to the Basis of Union we confess our collusion with sin individually, and the sins of our fractured and deficient communities of family, society and nation. We have participated in the church's fall into deeper unfaithfulness. We acknowledge that it is only by God's grace that we are being freed to confess our faith and our sins along with the whole historic church.

We acknowledge sin to be not merely human inadequacy or immaturity nor a primitive notion unworthy of an enlightened humanity. Sin is rebellion against God and rejection of divine grace.

In acknowledging our sin we are confident not in our confession but in Christ the Lord who confesses our sins on our behalf and bears our guilt on the cross. He is the Intercessor, our great High Priest, who identifies with us, representing us before the Father, calling a transformed community of faith to fulfil its mission. In response to Christ's redeeming

love we are set free to confess our sins and to turn anew to our neighbour.

Therefore we reject the notion that life in Christ removes the need to participate in his body, the church; and to repent of sin.

4. The witness of Holy Scripture

The church receives the scriptures of both Old and New Testament as the unique witness of the apostles and prophets to Jesus Christ who is the Word of God by whom the church is constantly reformed. This witness of apostle and prophet is neither deceived nor deceiving, neither confused nor incoherent; in human form it is God's testimony to the divine will and purpose. The same trinitarian God is present in the witness of both the Old and New Testaments. Accordingly we commit ourselves to read the Holy Scripture in a community of love, trusting in the Holy Spirit to empower the text to penetrate our lives and create that truth whose form is Jesus Christ among us. We welcome the work of biblical scholars and interpreters throughout history, which makes the witness of scripture contemporary through the same Spirit.

Therefore we reject any suggestion that this unique testimony can be interpreted by any 'authority' other than the biblical witness itself through the work of the Holy Spirit.

5. Faith and ethics

For Christians ethics refers to the way God shapes us and the whole creation through his action in Jesus Christ. Ethics is therefore inseparable from doctrine. When God acted in Jesus Christ he revealed himself as both the life of humanity and the life of God. Consequently, in Christ we know human life to be wonderfully free and deeply sacrificial. Life in Christ takes place within God's purpose for all creation, binding us

in solidarity with all others. This freedom is both the future goal of God's redemptive action for the world and his plan already bearing fruit through the proclamation of the gospel.

Therefore we reject the notion that ethics is a matter of personal preference or individual rights.

CONCLUSION

We make this declaration inviting all who seek to be obedient to Christ to submit again to his authority attested in Holy Scripture and acknowledged by the church in the ecumenical creeds and the historic documents named in the Basis of Union (paragraph 10).

With the Basis of Union of the church (paragraph 4), we confess and acknowledge anew our faith 'that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist'. Even so, 'Come Lord Jesus' (Rev 22:20).