

Confessing Statement from the Executives of the Reforming Alliance and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU)

Note: This statement was adopted a founding document of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia at the inaugural meeting held 13 – 14 October 2006.

Preamble:

This meeting of the National Executives of the Reforming Alliance and EMU on 27-28 February 2006, takes place at a point of crisis of faith in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia. This is a perilous time for the church and we are constrained by the witness of the Old and New Testaments to Jesus Christ to make this confession of faith before the church and all people:

1. We believe in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in the prophetic and apostolic testimony of the Old and New Testaments who is the one Word of God whom we must hear, trust and obey in life and in death.
2. He who is the Truth declared that from the beginning God has ordered creation so that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh (Mark 10:6-9; Genesis 2:24).
3. We reject the unsubstantiated claim made in the name of diversity that other understandings of sexuality can be accepted alongside that of the apostolic testimony in the Scriptures and followed by the Catholic Orthodox and Evangelical church over the past two thousand years.
4. We therefore find ourselves in unresolved conflict with the Assembly's declared permission to ordain practising homosexual persons living in "right relationships" on a case-by-case basis (The so called 'Resolution 84.'). We believe the ordination of a person in a same gender sexual relationship is irreconcilable with the faith and order of the Church.

5. By accepting the implications of Resolution 84 the Uniting Church has determined to incorporate into the church's order what the Old and New Testament and the tradition of the universal church holds to be a sin. By this decision the church has set itself apart from the universal tradition of the church and the clear teaching of the apostolic witness to Christ and has thus become a disordered and apostate church.
6. We plead, therefore, with our sisters and brothers in the Uniting Church to heed the warnings from our sister churches (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran) which will impact on the progress towards unity. Further, we affirm that as members of the Uniting Church our prior loyalty is to Jesus Christ the Word of God as attested in the Holy Scriptures and the Faith of the Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical Church.
7. We join in the prayer of paragraph 18 of *The Basis of Union* that 'the People of God on the way' 'through the gift of the Spirit will be constantly subject to correction of all that is erroneous in the church's life; that it will be brought into deeper unity with other Churches, ...'
8. But we warn that if the Uniting Church continues in its present course it will result in schism. As the distinguished Lutheran theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg declares; "For a church that would permit itself to be pressured to no longer understand homosexual activity as a deviation from the biblical norm and to recognize homosexual partnerships alongside marriage, such a church would no longer be based on the foundation of Scripture, but, rather in opposition to its unanimous witness. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Pannenberg in *Christianity Today* (Nov. 11, 1996; pp.34-38).
9. The false teaching present in the Uniting Church Assembly's decision has not originated in the living Word by which the Church's faith and obedience is nourished and regulated, but has its origins in the developing secular culture of a more permissive attitude to sexual behaviour in the Western world.
10. The confessional statement which follows is based upon the apostolic witness in which we hear the Word of God, and the Faith of the Church as understood in the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Our Confession

We confess our faith in God the Creator who endows human life with the gift of sexuality whereby female and male partners are joined in one flesh.

The apostolic witness of the New Testament follows a clear path of reasoning. Jesus, when challenged by the Pharisees on the grounds for divorce invokes neither the law nor right relationships based on love. Sexuality is set at a more basic level of human existence. Jesus cites the creation stories in Genesis. God made humans male and female. (Mark 10:8)

In the Genesis account (Gen 1:26-27) humans' likeness to God is not spelled out in terms of the human creature's rationality, creativity, moral consciousness, free will or any other distinctive feature that distinguishes humans from animals. It is the fact of gender which distinguishes human beings in their personal and relational likeness to God.

Whereas the world of animals is 'created according to its kind' or species, humankind is not so classified into various species of race or culture or other kind of diversity, but simply by way of gender. Gender is not a species. Humans' co-existence as male and female, the basic form of their humanity, is the expression of their likeness to God. The sanctioning of homosexual relationships countenances another species of human being which is contrary to God's word.

In the same way Paul argues the case for relationships using the doctrine of 'the body' and the language of the creation story. In condemning prostitution he cites the same passage (Genesis 2:24) using the Greek word for 'clinging' to Christ rather than 'clinging' to a 'prostitute' (I Corinthians 6:12-20) and invokes 'the two shall be one flesh'. Paul sets the body relationship in the redemptive language of the Trinity: since we have been bought by the Father with a price our bodies are meant for our Lord Jesus Christ; our bodies are the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

Like Paul's emphasis on the one flesh unity of husband and wife, the author of Ephesians invokes the dual connection of Christ's love for the church (5:25) and his tender care for the church 'because we are members of his body.' (5:30).

In a dramatic way, he invokes the Genesis passage, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.' (5:31-32). Thus the death and resurrection of Christ is tied to the 'members of his body' and, for the Christians, that unity is sacramentally linked to the bodily unity of husband and wife becoming one flesh.

Therefore we confess our faith in God the Creator and Redeemer whose will and purpose for man and woman revealed in the giving of Christ's body in love for the Church is that they should become one flesh with Him as members of His Body. We honour those who are called by Christ (1Cor 7 Cf. Matt 19:12) to the celibate life for the sake of their discipleship to Christ.

Homosexuality condemned in Scripture: With matching clarity and consistency the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis 19:1-29, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13a.) and the Apostolic Witness (Romans 1:26-28, I Corinthians 6:9-10) reject all other forms of sexual activity. Paul affirms that 'fornicators male prostitutes, sodomites' (among others) will not inherit the kingdom of God.' and this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.'

We confess anew our faith in Christ who 'died for our sins' (I Cor 15:3) in order that we might be forgiven; reconciling us through his death, and making us part of his new creation. Consequently, the nature of God's will and purpose for human life and its negation through sin is central for the understanding of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel and 'the new order of righteousness and love.' (paragraph 3 *The Basis of Union*).

We therefore confess our faith in Jesus Christ whose compassion and love is directed to all people. Since all have fallen short, God calls all to repentance to receive the gift of forgiveness through faith, bestowing the Holy Spirit and calling humans to obedience.

We believe that the Church's solidarity with but not conformity to the world (Rom 3:23), and its gratitude for the reconciliation of the world in Christ (2 Cor 5:16-21) commits her:

- To speak Christ's word of mercy and friendship to any person who is tempted by homosexual practice, and to offer them counselling and pastoral care (John 8:1-11) when they experience temptation, hostility, illness or bereavement (Galatians 6:1-6).
- To invite people practicing homosexuality to experience Christ's freedom by abandoning behaviour which is contrary to the clear witness of Scripture (Galatians 5:16-25).

We accept our obligation to love all people welcoming them to worship and providing them with pastoral care.

We affirm the naming of sins which stand in the way of being made whole in Christ. This is not for condemnation but for salvation (John 3:16-17). We therefore reject attempts to affirm any form of homo- or bi-sexual practice in the name of 'justice or 'compassion'; we find no basis for this view in the Old and New Testaments.

Willing to be corrected: With the Scots Confession of 1560 we would plead that if any should note in this confession anything contrary to God's word in the Old and New Testaments they would of their Christian charity make us aware of it in writing. We promise that if we are proved to be amiss by the Holy Scriptures we shall acknowledge such and make amendment. Until then our consciences are bound to God's word whose witness confirms our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Truth to whom we must cleave and whom we must obey.

Amen