



## Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia  
Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, Proclaiming the truth, Renewing the church

Website: [www.confessingcongregations.com](http://www.confessingcongregations.com)

Mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042 Tel: (02) 9550 5358

Email: [accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Registered Office: 2 Erskineville Road, Newtown NSW

ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785

Incorporated in NSW INC9887628 Liability of Members is Limited

23 May 2018

*Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ*

I write this second pastoral letter on behalf of the National Council as way of encouragement to you and your congregations to continue to remain steadfast in the faith, particularly during these testing times. Many of you would have now read the report of the Assembly Standing Committee on 'Marriage and same-gender relationships' with its **radical proposal to redefine marriage to being between "two people" regardless of sex or gender**. Because of the seriousness of the matter before us, the National Council has commissioned a formal response to the report and will make this available as soon as possible.

**The purpose of this letter is threefold:**

1. To highlight the implication of redefining marriage as a matter that enters into the substance of the faith;
2. To highlight what it means to be the ACC within the UCA as a way of encouragement to stand firm; and
3. To highlight further work that needs to be done.

### **1. What is the implication of redefining marriage as a matter that enters into the substance of the faith?**

The central thesis that drives the proposal by the UCA Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) to refine marriage is the view that marriage is not a matter that "enters into the substance of faith" and therefore a matter that "allows for a difference of opinion" (UCA Basis of Union [BoU] para. 14d).<sup>1</sup> It is why there is no mention in the proposal about the need for Assembly to seek concurrence with the other councils on matters that are "vital to the life of the church" as required by clause 39(a) of the Constitution.

The ACC has already made clear in its "*Declaration on Marriage and the Family*" that marriage **is** a matter that enters into the "Substance of the faith"<sup>2</sup> because it permeates the whole of Scripture, undergirds other central doctrines of the Church, is necessary for explaining Christ's relationship to the Church, is central to understanding salvation history as a whole, and so forth. To put it another way, marriage enters into the substance of the faith because it acts as an Architectural Doctrine or a load-bearing wall.<sup>3</sup> As such, it cannot be removed without doing significant irreparable damage to the overarching structure of the house. That is, all of the other historic doctrines of the Christian faith cannot be left intact should this doctrine be removed.

This is why Assembly cannot and must not redefine marriage. To do so would be a departure from the Basis of Union and a withdrawal from our commitment that began in 1977 to be part of a church movement that was not "its own denomination", but part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.<sup>4</sup>

### **2. What does it mean to be the ACC within the UCA?**

I understand that there are already some people and congregations feeling that they cannot remain within the UCA should Assembly redefine marriage in July. This is understandable particularly in the light of what has been said about our doctrine on marriage acting as an architectural doctrine. If the Assembly does the unthinkable and redefines marriage, can one still remain with integrity within a denomination that has become truly apostate? On what 'Basis' could one remain within the UCA?

What is at stake is providing "enough ecclesiastical separation"<sup>5</sup> or a 'hedge of protection' around us so that we can continue to confess Christ as Lord with integrity, a clear conscience and without compromising the faith. Understanding the specific calling of the ACC is important at this time. **Two important points:**

**(a) Calling:** Confessing movements such as the ACC have always felt "called" to remain within the mainline denomination and to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1: 3).

Jesus said, "Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love." (John 15: 9). Important to note, that the calling to 'remain' makes sense only in the light of the fact that other people have ceased to do so.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Refer p.8 Fifteenth Assembly Report – B23 Marriage and Same-Gender Relationships. <https://uniting.church/b4-standing-committee>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/ACC\\_Marriage\\_Declaration\\_2016\\_Web\\_Version.pdf](http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/ACC_Marriage_Declaration_2016_Web_Version.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/is-marriage-an-architectural-doctrine-of-the-christian-faith/>

<sup>4</sup> See incisive review by National Director, Peter Bentley, on the Report on Marriage and same gender relationships by the ASC. <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/news-views/item/an-initial-reflection-on-the-uca-report-on-marriage/>

<sup>5</sup> Ted A. Campbell "What's likely to Happen to the UMC in 2019-2020 and Beyond: Some Scenarios".

<sup>6</sup> See any definition of the word 'remain' in any our common dictionaries.

**(b) Holiness:** To be called *is* to be 'set apart', i.e. to be holy, so "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2: 9). The purpose of being set apart is so that we may better fulfil the great commission as outlined in Matthew. 28: 16-20.

### ***How has the ACC done this practically?***

**(c) Confessional Statements:** The ACC has put together explicit and unambiguous statements of faith grounded and rooted in the authority of Holy Scripture (BoU para. 5). That is, our foundational documents seek to make very clear what we believe God to be saying to us at this time and why we cannot compromise these truths, particularly in a post-Christian or post-truth era.<sup>7</sup>

**(d) Incorporation:** To be 'set apart' required that we became an incorporated entity. This provides a necessary degree of 'independence' or 'enough ecclesiastical separation' to make clear to the National Assembly that 'orthodoxy' (Basis of Union) can never be treated or made part of the 'diversity' of theologies and sexual practices within the UCA. As Vaughan Roberts from the Anglican Church puts it, "There must be such robust walls built that anyone looking on can see that you are standing for the truth of the gospel and can preach repentance without fear".<sup>8</sup>

### **3. Further action**

The ACC National Council will also explore the following:

- A. **Maintaining our 'marriage rites':** The open letter by the Reverend Rod James<sup>9</sup> expresses clearly the very "unsafe place" we will be in as ministers and congregations should the marriage rites of the UCA be changed. That is, we will become very vulnerable to legal challenges, particularly as the situation becomes more normalised now that same-gender marriage is permissible under Australian law. As such, the National Council will explore the possibility of maintaining our own authorised marriage rites.
- B. **Maintaining Ecumenical Partnerships:** It is clear that the ASC has not consulted with our ecumenical partners on the question of marriage and same-gender relationships. As such, it has failed in our constitutional commitment to live and work within the faith and unity of the Only Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The ACC will, therefore, continue to dialogue with our ecumenical partners on this matter.
- C. **Legal Counsel:** As redefining our doctrine on marriage will be a departure from the UCA's own Basis of Union and Constitution, it will be necessary to seek legal advice. The Bermuda Trial within the United Church of Canada (UCC) provides some context for what this may mean, where "expert testimony given by Dr. Victor Shepherd demonstrated that the UCC has intentionally and repeatedly contravened its own Basis of Union in its formal theology as well as its day-to-day operative theology".<sup>10</sup>

May I commend to you again **our first pastoral letter** in terms of what to do before, during and after the July 2018 National Assembly? In particular, may I stress the importance of standing firm and not making any hasty decisions or acting alone as this will only weaken the church. Let us work together. We pray that God will 'constantly correct that which is erroneous' in the life of the UCA (BoU para. 18).

Grace and peace



Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki  
On behalf of the ACC National Council

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/about/founding-documents/>

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, Vaughan. Faith in a Time of Crisis: Standing for the Truth in a Changing World.

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Rod James Letter [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b39624\\_0aa8e8918492493ba1555f362c32a4c1.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b39624_0aa8e8918492493ba1555f362c32a4c1.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *The case concerns a small congregation in Bermuda which has sought to withdraw from The United Church of Canada on the basis of the UCC's deviation from Christian doctrine. The congregation wished to sever association with the UCC while retaining title to church property. The judgement of Madam Justice Wade ruled in favour of the congregation. 10<sup>th</sup> June 1998.* [www.victorshepherd.ca/bermuda-trial/](http://www.victorshepherd.ca/bermuda-trial/)