



Assembly of Confessing Congregations

Pastoral Letter in the lead up to the 15th Assembly in July: 6 April 2018

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ

As many of you will know, we are now in one of the most important periods of time in our history as the Uniting Church in Australia as we approach the next Uniting Church Assembly to be held in Melbourne beginning Sunday 8th July to Saturday 14th July 2018.

There is genuine fear, should the Uniting Church Assembly endorse any proposal to redefine marriage, or approve liturgies for the blessing for same-sex couples, or, think that it can avoid the real issue by withdrawing from its marriage licence from the State, that this will lead to schism within the Uniting Church, and that many will leave frustrated with a denomination that is ashamed of the gospel.

1. What are we to do at this time? The National Council of the ACC provides the following direction:

- **Pray:** The Prayer Network of the ACC will lead us through a 40 day season of prayer and fasting as well as providing devotions and resources to help guide us through this period of time. These resources will be made available on our ‘School of Faith’ Website.
- **Write:** We encourage all our members and congregations to write ‘open letters’ to Assembly calling Assembly to maintain our 1997 biblical position on marriage as being between a man and a woman.
- **Make-public:** We invite you to make your letters public by sending us a copy of your ‘open letter’ so that we can post it on our website. In this way, Assembly cannot simply file or hide your letters in the privacy of the Assembly office.
- **Submit proposals to Assembly:** If there is still time, submit a proposal to your Presbytery asking that they call the Assembly to maintain our 1997 policy statement on marriage, and that any proposed changes to this policy be submitted to other councils of the church including congregations for concurrence, as required by the Basis of Union and Constitution (para. 15e). Note: two members of the 15th Assembly can also submit a proposal directly to the Assembly.
- **Encourage others:** please alert and encourage other Uniting Church members and congregations to do likewise.

2. During the Assembly meeting in July:

- **Pray:** Speaking out during the actual Assembly meeting itself is a daunting task, particularly if this is your first Assembly, and if you are not confident speaking in public. So, please pray for courage and boldness for your Assembly delegates.
- **Be prepared:** Preparation for Assembly delegates is vital. Know what we believe and why we believe what we believe.
- **Be strong:** Be bold and courageous knowing that what you are called to say is not your personal opinion, but the truth according to Scripture which has ultimate and final authority on matters of doctrine. The Uniting Church’s Basis of Union does not permit us to speak of any truth that is not grounded in the received books of the Old and New Testaments in which we hear the Word of God, who is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ (BoU Paras. 3 & 4), through whom our “faith and obedience are nourished and regulated” (BoU Para. 5).

3. Post Assembly July 2018:

- **Stand Firm:** Whatever decision is made by Assembly, please stand firm; do not make any hasty decisions; do not act alone. Noting, that should Assembly make any decision to redefine marriage or adopt liturgies for the blessing of same sex couples, it will be the Assembly itself that will have departed from the Basis of Union that commits us to live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. That is, it will be Assembly that will be promoting schism, not the ACC. We call on all our members and congregations to make a stand and say, “We are not permitted to do this. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God”.
- **Wait:** Another pastoral letter will be sent out immediately after the Assembly with further instruction and encouragement. Please wait for that letter and encourage others to wait and to stand firm. Noting that the ACC is committed to maintaining our current course: remaining faithful and committed to our confession that Jesus Christ alone is the living head of the Church, and adherence to the Basis of Union that commits us to the authority of Scripture.
- **Commit:** We encourage you to commit to attending the ACC National Conference to be held at Wesley Mission in Sydney 17-19 September 2018. At this conference we will make clear from the Basis of Union and our ecumenical partners what it means to live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Ecclesiastes 3: 7 reminds us that there is time to be silent and a time to speak. If there was ever a time for us as Christians particularly within the UCA to speak up, it is now. Now is the time to speak! Now is the time to Stand up and be counted!

“Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1: 9);

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (1 Timothy 1: 7).

Grace and peace

Rev. Dr Hedley Fihaki, ACC Chair

On behalf of the National Council of the ACC within the UCA

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