

ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Downhill

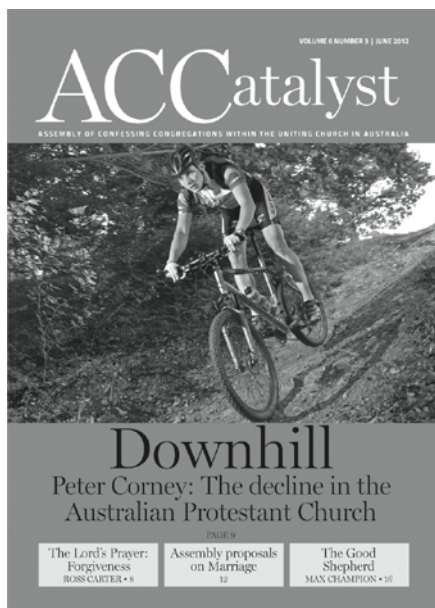
Peter Corney: The decline in the Australian Protestant Church

PAGE 9

The Lord's Prayer:
Forgiveness
ROSS CARTER • 8

Assembly proposals
on Marriage
12

The Good
Shepherd
MAX CHAMPION • 16



Cover: Stehen Kehrberg

EDITORIAL

History flows two ways

In some sense we are still all Marxists. The notion of class is still with us, for example.

A less helpful concept though is “historical inevitability”, the idea that social change flows in a predictable direction.

You can see that sort of thinking in operation when one side in a dispute is said to be “on the right side of history”. Often it is put like this... the civil rights movement gave the vote and equal rights to Black Americans, feminism extended rights to women and now to be on the right side of

history we should support this next change. Whatever it is.

Often Martin Luther King Jr’s quote “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice” is used. Christians who oppose gay marriage, but who support many of these earlier “liberation” movements can feel trapped. But just remember Karl Marx. After 50 years of seeming success his cause disappeared overnight.

What seems successful today can suffer a reverse tomorrow.

John Sandeman

ACCatalyst is published by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.
 ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785.
 Incorporated in NSW. INC 9887628.
 Liability of members is limited. Opinions expressed in ACCatalyst do not necessarily reflect the official views of the assembly.

Executive Editor: Max Champion
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley
 Editor: John Sandeman
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW
 02 9550 5358
 Website: confessingcongregations.com
accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

Email for ACCatalyst:
catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com
 ACCatalyst is available as a subscription only (\$35pa) or by becoming an ACC Supporting Member (\$35pa concession or \$60pa full)
 Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Bayswater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

A wedding and a funeral

This week was an unusual one for me. I don’t think I had ever been to a wedding and a funeral on two consecutive days until this week. I thought it would be a bit weird going to two such different events. One was family and friends getting together to celebrate; the other family and friends getting together to grieve. For me it also meant a lot of driving as the wedding was in Adelaide and the funeral was in Wirrabara.

But now as I look back, what strikes me most is not the difference between the two events but the similarities. At both, people dragged out their rarely worn good clothes from the wardrobe. Both involved a large gathering of people in a church. Both involved eating food afterwards — nice food!

And both were huge social occasions! Before I even got in the door at the wedding I met up with old friends that I hadn’t seen for a long time. It was great to catch up. Afterwards a group of us stood outside and chatted for ages. We may not see each other very often these days, but



Hilary Sandeman

our friendship still remains strong.

The next day at Wirrabara it was a stinking hot day and before the funeral started a crowd had gathered under the trees in front of the church. Many were old mates who hadn’t seen each other in years. Despite the shared grief of the crowd, there was laughter and joy as they caught up on each other’s news. The

conversations continued over afternoon tea. Yes, it was a sad occasion, but there was cheer in that gathering also.

And that’s not a bad thing. People are made for relationships. We get great joy from our friends and families, and life would be lacking if we didn’t have that. You see, we are made in the image of God and God is all about relationships. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the three have the best friendship in the world. They just enjoy each other and love to serve one another. So great is that friendship that they desire to draw each one of us into it. They want us to share what they have. Our desire for relationship is finally satisfied when we know God and become his friend.

But that doesn’t mean he wants us to leave behind all our human relationships. Instead, as we experience God’s love and friendship we will grow in love for other people, because we will understand how much God loves them also.

Robyn



ACC NEWS

Bowen Uniting Church

Peter Bentley in Qld

Arising from a seminar invitation from Rev Euan McDonald and ACC member congregation Iona West, Peter took the opportunity to visit a number of ACC congregations and ministers from May 27 – June 3.

Peter was able to bring greetings and talk about the ACC at Mount Louisa House of Praise (Townsville), Home Hill (meeting at Ayr Burdekin Parish), Bowen, Proserpine and Mackay.

Peter met a number of our individual members at informal meetings and also at the events held at Iona West in Mackay on the week-

end of 2-3 June, which included two preaching engagements and a seminar on the topic of “The Future of Marriage”, exploring how marriage has changed in Australia; there was a focus on the challenges presently before the Uniting Church, concluding with ideas for local churches to support and encourage marriage in our communities today.

Peter would like to thank you the local members who warmly hosted him during the visit. “It was a personal time of encouragement and very helpful to meet members I have corresponded with over the years”.

Belrose UC joins ACC

ACC was pleased to receive another new congregational member earlier in the year. Belrose UC is a lively congregation in the northern area of Sydney (Warringah) and has three worship services and a range of weekly activities, especially with youth under the direction of the Youth Worker Zoe Chapman. The Minister of Belrose (since 2011) is Rev Ian Weeks, convener of the NSW ACC Movement.

Their website states: “We are a Christ-centred, Bible-based church and we welcome you to our website. Please browse through it. We hope you find something that will interest you. Whether you attend church regularly or not, we are here every week and we would be delighted to welcome you to our church.”

Belrose have added the ACC logo to their home page and ACC information is prominent on their website (including the ACC submission to the senate inquiry on same-sex marriage). <http://www.belrose.uniting-church.org.au/>

Discipleship talk at NSW AGM

The NSW Movement annual meeting was held on 14th April 2012 at Sutherland Uniting Church.

The meeting noted with sadness the sudden passing of the Rev. Dr John Mallison. John’s service was a great celebration of his life, faith and faithful ministry, attended by many people from across the denominational spectrum, including significant leaders from within the UCA, other denominations, and parachurch organisations. John had been a wonderful encourager of the ACC (and its antecedent organisations in the UCA), as well as an esteemed servant of the Church. John gave an impassioned presentation on evangelism and discipleship to the ACC NSW gathering in October 2011. So we are grateful that we were able to have John minister to us for that time.

The AGM was blessed with an address by Dr Jeffrey Aernie, NT lecturer at the United Theological College, Sydney. Jeff studied theology at Wheaton College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

He completed his PhD at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), and prior to coming to UTC, had taught biblical studies courses in both the United States and the UK.

Jeff spoke on Discipleship from 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 16: *14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?* (NIV)

Jeff drew our attention to the fact that:

1. It is God who is both the leader of the triumphant procession, AND the object of praise of the procession - He has conquered the enemy (sin and death) for us; and
2. our salvation, the result of this victory, is a pleasant aroma rising up to God.

Jeff went on to remind us that Christian discipleship:

- Can be a difficult endeavour – we are captives to Christ; BUT
- is not impossible – in Christ’s sufficiency; and
- is developed upon an old and bloody path – of Christ’s suffering and death.

Those gathered appreciated Jeff’s scholarly and yet pastoral presentation.

Ian Weeks NSW Chair



clisale/istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO - MAXIMUS

UnitingJustice?

In April, UnitingJustice, the social responsibility arm of the UCA National Assembly, made a submission to the Federal Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. (www.unitingjustice.org.au) Supporting the push for Marriage Equality in civil law, it bases the argument on human rights, but ignores the rights of children to be brought up by their biological fathers and mothers.

The submission states the Uniting Church doctrine of marriage but argues that it is merely an internal church matter that shouldn't stand in the way of legislation that recognises the equality of same-sex marriages.

"Without acknowledgement of same-sex relationships under the Marriage Act, there runs the very real risk of viewing same-sex relationships as somehow inferior to opposite-sex relationships. ...

"While UnitingJustice welcomed the removal of many discriminatory aspects of our legislative framework in 2008, we believe that the Marriage Act in its current form continues to discriminate against same-sex couples by failing to allow them to validate their commitment to each other under our Commonwealth laws."

It is astonishing that such a submission has been made when the Uniting Church is still to debate the issue.

The fact that it was authorised by leaders in the Assembly Secretariat without being presented to

the Assembly Standing Committee is cause for great unease. The ACC has issued a strong response to the General Secretary, the President and the President-elect.

Sunrise or Sunset?

The Sunrise breakfast program on Channel 7 joined with *Get Up!* and *Marie Claire* to proudly promote same-sex marriage in the first week of June. It is supported by the hosts, David Koch and Melissa Doyle, and by a host of celebrities like Megan Gale and Jennifer Hawkins.

Executive producer Michael Pell said "We are trying to make a difference, affect change..." (*Herald-Sun* 3 June) While understanding that not everybody will approve, they are anxious to make a difference and do more than simply reporting the news.

And what is the rationale for this bold prophetic stance? "*It's not an issue about sexuality, it's a human rights issue.*"

There you have it. Don't worry about the sexual choices that people make or the consequences for family life and social wellbeing. Simply affirm their right to choose, subject only to the consent of another partner or partners. The inalienable right to choose is now established dogma that brooks no dissent.

In view of the insidious and successful role played by popular figures in film, TV and other media over many decades to re-shape sexual relationships, the questions facing us are: Has the sun finally set on Chris-

tendom? And, when will we see the flickering light of a new dawn?

Power play

Thomas Sowell, noted American economist and social commentator, has identified a widespread practice that is designed to achieve and hold

The dire social consequences of re-inventing marriage on such a shallow concept of love should not be underestimated.

power. He writes: "When an organisation has more of its decisions made by committees, that gives more influence to those who have more time available to attend meetings and to drag out each meeting longer. In other words, it reduces the influence of those who have work to do, and are doing it, while making those who are less productive more influential." Sounds familiar!

It's not just that power falls into the hands of unimaginative bureaucrats. As Czech novelist Zdenek Urbanek, writing before the collapse of the Soviet Union, said: "In dictatorships we are more fortunate than you in the West in one respect. We believe nothing of what we read in the

newspapers and nothing of what we watch on television, because we know it is propaganda and lies. Unlike you in the West, we've learned to look behind the propaganda and to read between the lines, and unlike you, we know that the real truth is subversive." Sound advice for a church and a society so easily duped by talk of freedom and rights!

Menage a Quatre anybody?

They said it wouldn't happen. Only alarmists believed in the 'slippery slope' from same-sex 'marriage' for two to multiple-partner 'marriages.' *The Australian* (21 May) says otherwise. It reports that "the power couple of Australia's increasingly open poly-amorous community, Rebecca and James Dominguez, have made Senate submissions urging the legalisation of same-sex marriage, as they promote greater acceptance of multiple-partner relationships."

Living in a four-person household where sex is not confined to their relationship, the Dominguez's argue that traditions are made to be redefined. They look forward to the day when an increasingly tolerant society will embrace and legalise 'plural marriages' irrespective of the sexual orientation of the partners.

Liberal Senator, Eric Abetz, noted that such proposals were inevitable once the concept of marriage between a man and a woman was superseded. He said that "the logical conclusion is the complete deconstruction of the institution that is marriage," a development that will endanger "the security of the next generation."

The dire social consequences of re-inventing marriage on such a shallow concept of love should not be underestimated.

Ageing for life or death

The latest edition of *The Senior* newspaper makes strange reading. Next to an ad thanking volunteers at Uniting-Care and an article on an activity at

the Wesley Mission School for Seniors there is an ad for a group of Christians supporting choice for voluntary euthanasia.

The catalyst is the Rev Trevor Bensch, former minister at North Adelaide Baptist Church and currently Baptist Chaplain at two major hospitals. No doubt compassion for dying patients and their families has

played a part in his decision to form the new body. But one wonders about the priorities of a chaplain who seems more concerned to encourage voluntary euthanasia than to take measures to support the life of the terminally dying person.

How odd to put 'volunteering for life' and 'voluntary death' side by side in a paper for seniors!

IAN CLARKSON

Fixing Christmas

I don't know what the Christmas themes and decorations were like in your city council area or shopping centre last year, but in our CBD they were big and loud but the content of Christmas was about zero. Hardly a suggestion of baby Jesus even. All season but no reason. Walk down the mall and it was all buy but no why. All "Cashmas", no Christmas!

Well now is the time to do something about it for this—or maybe next Christmas. Let's get on to our Councils, mall and shopping management people and warmly suggest something that carries the meaning of it all as best as can be done in symbol and sign. We might even get together with some imaginative designers and offer ideas and drafts.

I doubt if there would be strong objection in most cases but there could be something like: Multiculturalism, we don't want to offend others who don't believe in the origin of Christmas.

Really? Who are these offendees anyway? My guess is they are only a near zero handful of wizened atheists on a 'crusade', or maybe some ex-church goers once hurt now in positions of bureaucratic power. Or just folk who haven't really thought about it.

Overseas tourists are on the look-out for the indicators of our

beliefs and distinctives that have sourced and enriched our culture. Can you imagine the Chinese Communist Party banning decorations in Beijing's malls to the year of the rat because it might offend delicate Aussie lady tourists, who in reality have come to China anyway to taste a bit of their unique culture? And the fact is, Christmas and Christ is the fact of the matter!

Australia Post usually issue stamps depicting a Christmas theme, anyway. And the highest authority in our Commonwealth, the Queen, whose head is on our coins, whose office authorises our laws and institutions of enforcement declared in her Christmas message last year that Christ is Lord. That should settle the multicultural tease.

The civic-sponsored decorations are actually ours—we are the civic! And they say something. They can legitimately carry something of a declaration of the Gospel—at least a hint that can stir some thinking of the sweetest, strongest, strangest most beautiful report the world has ever heard!

Let's get with appropriate management bodies and contribute gently yet confidently on this simple yet significant level while we have a head start time-wise. And why not let *ACCatalyst* know how you get on!

Does UnitingJustice speak for the

A note to UCA leaders enclosing a letter to the General Secretary

Rev Terence Corkin,
General Secretary
Uniting Church in Australia
PO Box A2266,
Sydney South, NSW 1235

8th June 2012

Dear Terence,

Please find enclosed a response by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) as a result of the submission made to Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 by UnitingJustice.

As we approach an Assembly at which 'Marriage Equality,' and related matters on same-sex relationships, will be a major focus, the National Council of the ACC would also encourage you to see that space is provided in the program for voices that are often silenced in the current public debate.

If the Assembly is to make informed decisions, and not simply endorse the views of prominent supporters of same-sex 'marriage,' we believe that it is vital that members of Assembly also hear from representatives of groups like Doctors for the Family, Family Voice, the Australian Christian Lobby, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the Lutheran Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as from counsellors at Encourage or Living Waters and homosexual activists who are opposed to same-sex 'marriage.'

Yours faithfully,

Rev Dr Max Champion
National Chair
Assembly of Confessing
Congregations within the Uniting
Church of Australia

Rev. Terence Corkin
General Secretary
National Assembly
Uniting Church in Australia
PO Box A2266
Sydney South, NSW 1235
By email and Express Post
8th June, 2012

Dear Terence,

Re: Submission by UnitingJustice to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012

I write on behalf of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia to complain about the submission made in April this year by Uniting Justice to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. It raises some extremely serious issues about the governance of the Uniting Church and the strategy being used in the lead up to the Thirteenth Assembly, at which 'Marriage Equality,' and related matters, will be a major item on the agenda.

The most urgent question concerns the authorisation of the submission. As there is no mention of it in the Minutes of the Assembly Standing Committee, which met on 16-18 March, 2012, it is reasonable to assume that you, as General Secretary, approved it on your own authority or in consultation with the President and/or the President-Elect and/or others in the Assembly Secretariat. If so, on what grounds was this done? UnitingJustice is not authorised to represent the Uniting Church in the public arena on matters that have not been adopted by the Assembly or approved by the Assembly Standing Committee. It has no authority to speak publicly on a matter of doctrine that has not even been debated in the councils of the Uniting Church.

The submission is also biased. While stating that the Uniting Church prides itself on being a diverse church, it privileges one form of diversity – that favoured by proponents and supporters of

same-sex 'marriage'. No attempt is made to articulate the theological and Scriptural basis for affirming that marriage is the life-long union between a man and a woman or to give credence to those who believe that it should be upheld.

Therefore, while giving the impression that the submission had the imprimatur of the Uniting Church, it effectively debunks the official position of the Church on marriage. UnitingJustice clearly believes that the current statement contradicts principles of social justice, equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – and should be changed. That this is one of the aims of the paper is evident in the clever, but disingenuous, device of claiming to be concerned only for civil, not church, law. As its critique is based on, albeit inadequate, concepts of human dignity and the image of God drawn from Uniting Church statements, Uniting Justice's submission makes it clear that the current Uniting Church definition of marriage is discriminatory.

Assurances that there is no desire to change church doctrine cannot, therefore, be believed.

The misuse of the Basis of Union to justify opposition to the current doctrine of marriage is disturbing. Having acknowledged that the 1997 Assembly affirmed that marriage is between a man and a woman, the submission then relativises this understanding in the light of "the right to equality". This radical shift is justified on the basis that the Basis of Union commits the Uniting Church to "remain open to constant reform" under Christ 'as the living Head of the Church'.

However, contrary to the assumption that "reform" means being "open-ended" to accept contemporary beliefs and practices, the Basis of Union links "openness" to the truth embodied in Christ and attested in the unity of Scripture. Therefore, what it means to be "open" to the Word of God may be very different from what it means to be "open" to evolving ideas and life-choices.

whole church?

The use of concepts such as social justice, human rights, inclusion and discrimination are theologically flawed. In Scripture, justice and rights must accord with what God reveals to be righteous. The inclusion of the lost, the outcast and the stranger is not at the expense of excluding what is amiss, and the faithful are called to discriminate between good and evil without abandoning those who do wrong.

The concept of diversity is also used in a way that is inconsistent with Reformed theology.

Acknowledging differences on this matter in the Uniting Church, the submission promotes the kind of diversity that departs from the clear biblical understanding of marriage. At the very least, one would have expected that a submission to the Federal Parliament would have set out the theological grounds on both sides of the argument in the Uniting Church. The fact that this was not done, and that the 'pain' of only one group was recognised, confirms the impression that UnitingJustice, and any key national leaders who authorised the submission, are not genuinely interested in diversity or in upholding the Church's approved teaching and practice on the matter. The conclusion is inescapable. In both the civil and ecclesiastical arenas, 'Marriage Equality' is the only form of diversity permitted by UnitingJustice and its influential supporters in the Uniting Church.

It is astonishing that the submission does not address the question of

the State's interest in enacting laws about sexual relationships. It affirms the right for individuals to have their committed (but not necessarily life-long) love recognised in law, but ignores the importance of family life and the raising of children for a civil society. In this regard, it is disturbing that UnitingJustice, a strong supporter of human rights, fails to mention the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, including the right of children to be raised by their biological father and mother.

In view of the failure of our national leaders and/or the Assembly Standing Committee to strongly and publicly reaffirm the Uniting Church's doctrine of marriage, without suggesting the possibility of it being changed in future, members are entitled to conclude that they are happy to let UnitingJustice take the lead in the run-up to Assembly, thus creating a climate that is conducive to the acceptance of resolutions that either endorse same-sex 'marriage' or move the Uniting Church to its acceptance at a later date.

It is most disturbing that, in its submission to the Federal Parliament, UnitingJustice has been given the freedom to actively, blatantly and publicly oppose the Uniting Church's doctrine and polity on marriage, and has done so by avoiding appropriate Assembly Standing Committee authorisation. This action makes a mockery of good governance in the Uniting Church and erodes the confidence of its members and congregations in the integrity of some

leaders and agencies who claim to speak on behalf of the whole church.

It is a matter of the gravest concern that the governance of the Uniting Church does not safeguard the integrity of our doctrine, thus permitting agencies, like Uniting Justice, to conduct their activities in the public domain without properly being held to account.

Please provide a copy of this letter to the members of the Assembly Standing Committee so they are aware of the urgent need for the Uniting Church to re-examine its governance procedures to ensure the integrity of what is said, and how it is communicated, in its name.

In view of the seriousness of the issues raised by the pre-emptive and dismissive action of UnitingJustice, with the seeming blessing of some influential national leaders, I am writing to the President, the President-Elect and other people and groups in the Uniting Church who may share these concerns.

I am also informing our ecumenical partners of the UnitingJustice submission and of our deep concern that, at the Thirteenth Assembly, the Uniting Church will be under extreme pressure to take decisions that will further isolate her from the one holy catholic and apostolic church that is genuinely open to reform under Christ.

Yours faithfully,

Rev. Dr. Max Champion
National Chair (ACC letterhead)



Forgiveness

ROSS CARTER continues an *ACCatalyst* series on the Lord's Prayer

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Arguably this is the hardest petition to speak about at this time in the life of the church and the society in which we Australians live. This is because what 'sin' was thought to mean by many people no longer impinges. In fact there has been a revolt against sin in the church and the community. Many people just don't think they have done anything wrong and, therefore, see no reason to be forgiven. They certainly see sin in the world around them, but do not see themselves as sinners. Other people, some of whom call themselves 'progressive Christians', regard the idea of sin as a barbaric and primitive notion that does not belong in our enlightened present. So is it possible to say anything about this petition that strikes a chord with modern people?

One thing that is clearly not going to strike a chord with people is to tell them that they are "miserable sinners" who need to fall on their knees and seek forgiveness. This may ultimately be true in some sense but it is not a helpful way of encouraging the praying of the Lord's Prayer at this time in the history of the church.

We can only rehabilitate this petition if we remind ourselves again of who taught his disciples and the church this prayer.

We have to put the prayer for forgiveness in the context of what Jesus does for humanity. Only in that context will we understand why we need to be forgiven and why we should forgive. Indeed, it is only in that context that the need for forgiveness avoids becoming a terrible burden, knowing that one needs, but does not experience, forgiveness.

In the parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son, the father reinstates a son who, in dire circumstances, has come to a moment of realisation, though not perhaps to moral conversion. The rejoicing father does not mention sin or repentance in explain-

ing his action to the older brother. Instead he speaks of the son "who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found." Thus we see that forgiveness is a miracle by which people are found in their lostness and separation from God.

The parable of the Lost Son points us to the ultimate act by which the whole of humanity is found and embraced by Christ Jesus in his resurrection and crucifixion. In this event we are found and forgiven, and in being forgiven know our lostness and separation from God and one another. In this way humanity discovers solidarity with one another in our mutual separation from the inheritance we have squandered.

Thus we know ourselves as sinners in solidarity with our fellow men and women only because of the action of God who commits himself to us in the resurrection and death of Christ Jesus. The love that finds us in this event is awesome and it is only because this miracle has happened that we are able to pray, "forgive us our sins." Note that we do not pray, "forgive me my sins", but rather "forgive us our sins" because we now know ourselves to be in community with our brothers and sisters. We recognise what we might call our 'negative' solidarity with others.

In our relationships we also see rare and precious traces of forgiveness. Sometimes, probably rarely, someone accepts and loves us unconditionally. When this immense fortune befalls us we know, simultaneously, the joy of this love as well as the darkness in our hearts that it uncovers. But it is the joy that frees us to ask forgiveness of the other.

But there is another part to this petition – "as we forgive those who sin against us." This second part can be understood in two ways, both of which are wrong. On one hand, we could understand it to mean that if we forgive one another then God will forgive us. But this is really impossible because, as we have seen, we only know forgiveness in the act of God's

forgiveness. On the other hand, we could understand it to mean that God forgives us first and then we forgive one another. This would mean that forgiving one another would be an obligation that we had to put in motion as a consequence of being forgiven ourselves. But then forgiveness would become an act separate from the action of God and a project that we could take on apart from the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The petition should not be divided into 'halves'. The point is that our forgiveness by God and our forgiveness of one another belong indissolubly together. In the self-giving of God in Christ we are found by God and, simultaneously, we find each other; as we are forgiven so we forgive. As the separation between God and ourselves is overcome so we are free to reach out to each other in forgiveness. As God recognises us as his children by coming to us in Christ, so we recognise one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It does need to be said that, in bringing this petition to God, sin is not banished from human hearts and human societies. We know that our violent separation and exclusion of others remains endemic in the world. But, in acknowledging this, we may also say that the pouring out of God's love in Christ Jesus means that human sin does not have the power to cut us off from God. Humanity is met and found in Christ. We have been forgiven, are being forgiven, and will be forgiven in Christ.

And finally, and most remarkably, we can say that, because of this awesome act of God in Christ, traces of the forgiveness that has encountered the world in him, may be found in the Christian community. In response to a forgiveness that we could never have given ourselves, the church, albeit in a fragmented way, is called to communally live out the forgiveness that reconciles enemies, restores the lost and brings peace and healing to wild and broken hearts.

Peter Corney: The decline in the Australian Protestant Church



Stephen Kehring

The main stream Protestant churches in Australia are in serious decline and have been for some time. To give but one example: attendance at worship on an average Sunday in the Anglican Church in Melbourne has dropped from an estimated 50,000 in 1981 to 21,000 in 2006. How did we get to this point so quickly?

As accelerating secularism began to hit Australian society in the 1960's the churches were not only unprepared they were also weakened by several trends that had been developing for some time.

One of the most significant was the trend in clergy training to become overly focused on pastoral maintenance rather than pastoral leadership, ministry skills and growth. The times called for new initiatives, new models of ministry, the ability to initiate change, new styles of worship that related to the rapidly changing culture. The training of clergy has properly always had a strong pas-

toral care element but three influences exaggerated this: the psychological counselling movement that developed momentum post war; the Christian Education movement; and the undermining of preaching and teaching by liberal theology. As secularism and rapid social change hit these influences coalesced to fatally weaken pastoral leadership.

There is always the danger in ministry of becoming over-reactive to the individual demands and needs of the flock and losing the ability to look outward, be proactive and to take initiative, to give time to evangelism, training, discipling, teaching and new creative initiatives. This leads to a pastoral maintenance syndrome. In times of social buoyancy for the Church this is not so damaging but when the social context is becoming unsupportive it is fatal.

These three influences worked in the following way.

The influence of the pastoral counselling movement encouraged many clergy into an even more passive and reactive role. CPE or Clinical and Pastoral Education

became a standard part of post-ordination training in the 60's and has continued on. While there were and are useful insights in all this for dealing with particularly troubled people, it was overly influenced by the fashionable psychological models current at the time and played down more traditional methods of spiritual counsel. Not only was pastoral counselling significantly secularised by this but more importantly the energy and attention of clergy was being refocused. At the very point when leadership, practical ministry skills and a focus on evangelism were needed many clergy got side-tracked by this influence in their training.

The influence of the Christian Education movement grew out of a real concern to see adults as well as children educated well in the faith by using the new educational insights that were being developed in the 50's and 60's in the wider educational field. There were many valuable insights gained and changes made to the way we taught people in this period.

Most denominations developed large departments of Christian Education that lasted into the early 80's before financial constraints reduced them dramatically. In many denominations they no longer exist. The Anglican Church had, as well as separate state bodies, a significant federal organisation the General Board of Religious Education (GBRE), now long gone. The Joint Board of Christian Education was formed to service what became the Uniting Church in this period.

But the dream that Christian Ed would save us has not been fulfilled. Some would say that is because it was never properly instituted at the local level but there were other factors. The movement became focused on process rather than content. The worst example was in the uncritical enthusiasm for the insights of Group Dynamics in adult learning. "Group Life laboratories" became the flavour of the month. The insights from the understanding of how groups work is fascinating and can be very helpful, it can also be used manipulatively, sideline solid information and create legitimacy for pooled ignorance. In an over-reaction to the old jug to mug approach to teaching, process overpowered content.

The influence on many clergy was twofold: they now saw themselves as group facilitators and enablers rather than leaders and teachers. Systematic teaching and Biblical preaching were downplayed. At a time when local churches needed to rethink and renew their mission and adapt their style and methods lay people were led into endless and frustrating non-directive group consultations on "What is our Mission?" These consultations rarely got past collections of butcher's paper with ideas scribbled on them that were never acted on. The result was that lay people became disillusioned and many clergy became paralysed, for some it even became a way of avoiding decisions and action.

As liberal theology contributed to emptying pastoral counselling of its classical content and psychologising it, so also it affected Christian Education and preaching. Uncertainty over theology and the Bible led Christian Ed away from content into process. While it was certainly true that much preaching was dull and uninspiring the emphasis in Christian education at the time on discussion and adult learning models further undermined respect for preaching. This leads us to the third and most influential trend.

The profound influence of liberal theology. The theological reaction of large parts of the Church to the impact of secularism in the 60's was a form of extreme theological accommodation. This sought to reduce those ideas in the Christian faith that the current culture of modernity found implausible to something it could believe. The impact was not at the periphery but at the core. Classical orthodox beliefs about the resurrection, the atonement, the authority of the Bible, the nature of salvation, the need for the response of repentance and faith, even the divinity of Christ were reconstructed to fit the prevailing plausibility structure. But because the traditional terminology and symbols were preserved while their first order meaning was being emptied out or radically changed, lay people were largely unaware of what was happening – their faith was being eroded by stealth.

As mentioned before preaching was also deeply affected by this liberal theology. Lack of theological clarity and certainty led to a general loss of confidence in preaching and produced bland vague moralising and shallow 'reflections' in the pulpit. Preaching fell out of fashion! Because adult education was never rigorously pursued in most local churches, slowly but surely congregations became uninformed, shallow and unclear about their faith, commitment levels dropped, evangelism lost its imperative.

It was the perfect storm! Just as secularism hit and the old social buoyancy around the local church was eroding and it needed to take new creative initiatives, reinvent its model of church, its methodology, its communications, its style of worship, music, and ministry, it was being led by people trained in pastoral maintenance rather than leadership and whose confidence in orthodoxy was deeply compromised. The style of ministry that could maintain congregations while community acceptance of their place and role was strong and a high proportion of people identified with the church, even if nominally, no longer worked in the emerging culture of the 60's. People left in droves. In 1960 the church I served at while I was in training had 500 children in the Sunday school and 200 boys in a mid week club. By the end of the 60's Sunday school attendance and confirmations had plummeted. This pattern was repeated everywhere.

Generally speaking those denominations and churches who have been less affected by the Pastoral Maintenance syndrome and Liberal theology have fared better. Overall Evangelicals and Pentecostals have actually grown while others have declined.

The lessons from all of this seem fairly clear. The knowledge and tools from the social sciences can be very helpful but they are also powerful and seductive and can easily overpower our theology. They also frequently promise more than they can deliver. When the Church's grasp on its core beliefs is weak or compromised they quickly become a substitute for the gospel. The other lesson is that Godly proactive leadership is critical in difficult times.

Peter Corney June 2010.

Assembly 2012 briefing

It is a good thing we are not superstitious people. Given the enormous weight on the Uniting Church this year on the matter of same-sex marriage (mainly from a small but vocal group of UCA ministers), our Assembly members will need much wisdom and prayer to continue to affirm the ecumenical and common Christian understanding of Marriage in Australia.

What is the Assembly?

The National Council of the Uniting Church in Australia.

When is the Assembly meeting?

15-21 July 2012

Where is it meeting?

The Hotel Grand Chancellor, Adelaide.

Who will be the President?

Rev Prof. Andrew Dutney will be installed as President of the Assembly at the opening public service of worship on Saturday 15th July at the Theatre in the Entertainment Centre. (Free event, but tickets are needed).

What will the ACC be doing at the 13th Assembly?

● Praying: Our prayer network and members will be covering the Assembly in prayer (and especially praying for evangelical members). Liverpool UC has a particular prayer event (see separate article).

● Supporting and Media Liaison: Our ACC National Director and Chair Rev Dr Max Champion will attend. Max is the ACC Media Spokesperson. Peter Bentley will attend to facilitate reports, prayer requests and liaise with ACC members. ACC members on email will receive regular reports.

Who is a member of the Assembly?

UCA Regulation 3.3.8 (a) outlines the membership of the Assembly:

3.3.8 (a) The membership of the Assembly shall consist of:

(i) ex-officio members:

- the President of the Assembly;
- the General Secretary of the Assembly;
- the ex-President of the Assembly;
- the President-elect of the Assembly;
- the Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress;
- the National Administrator of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

(ii) sixteen members of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress appointed by it, of whom no more than eight shall be Ministers;

(iii) Ministers and confirmed lay members from within the bounds of each Synod appointed as follows:

(1) number of members to be appointed from within the bounds of each Synod: [note -these are total numbers as each Presbytery within the bounds of the Synod shall appoint one Minister and one lay member]

NSW and ACT 54

Northern 10

Queensland 36

40 days of Life Overflowing : 12th June - 21st July 2012

"Be alert, and always keep on praying for all the Lord's People" Ephesians 6:18b

Prayer is vital for the life and mission of the church. Rev Dr. Andrew Dutney, the President Elect of the Uniting Church writes

"New Testament scholar James Dunn once said that mission is "finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in". That kind of "finding out... and joining in" is impossible without constant prayer through which we discern what God is up to and receive the strength and creativity to find our place within it. Wherever I get to know people and communities of faith genuinely engaged in mission I soon discover that at the heart of what they are doing is a deep commitment to prayer."

This year we will be having our Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia in Adelaide. Uniting Prayer and Fasting, a ministry of Liverpool Uniting Church is inviting every Uniting Church member, congregation, presbytery, Synod, Assembly, and agency to take part in "40 days of Life Overflowing". "Life Overflowing" is the Assembly theme chosen by our incoming President.

In Ephesians 5:26- 27, we read how Christ loves the church, giving himself up for her to make her holy. *Jesus does this by washing with water through the word. This is our prayer for the Uniting church, that Christ would do his work of purification in our midst. Together may we listen and read his word, and be washed by Christ's blood and receive his mercy, forgiveness and grace.*

continues page 12

South Australia 34

Victoria and Tasmania 58

Western Australia 20

(iv) Ministers and confirmed members appointed by bodies directly responsible to the Assembly after the Standing Committee specifies the bodies which may make appointments and the number of members who may be appointed by each of those bodies provided that the total number of members to be appointed pursuant to this paragraph shall not exceed 5% of the total number of members of the Assembly pursuant to Regulation 3.3.8 (i) -(iii);

(v) Ministers and confirmed members appointed by the outgoing Standing Committee having regard to the gifts, skills and experience needed by the Assembly provided

UCA MEETS

that the total number of members appointed pursuant to this paragraph shall not exceed 8% of the total number of members appointed pursuant to Regulation 3.3.8 (i) – (iii).

What are the responsibilities of the National Assembly?

The Basis of Union (1992 Edition) Paragraph 15 9e:

The Assembly (the national council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority being appointed by the Presbyteries and Synods. It has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church. It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church. ...

The Constitution of the UCA states in Section 38 (a):

38. (a) The Assembly shall have determining responsibility in matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards for theological education and the reception of Ministers from other denominations, and is empowered to make final decisions on all matters committed to it by this Constitution.

(b) Without limiting the generality of the preceding clause, the Assembly shall have the power:

(i) to make guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by the other councils of the Church.

40 days

During the 40 days we invite every Uniting Church member to pray and reflect daily upon the word as we pray for the Assembly. A prayer resource called "Life Overflowing" has been written for this purpose. It includes daily readings and reflections from the book of Ephesians and from the Basis of Union. It also has songs and reflections from Rev Dr. Andrew Dutney and prayer points to help us pray for the Assembly and our partners written by Rev Dr. Terence Corkin. This book can be downloaded for free from the Uniting Prayer and Fasting website on http://www.unitingprayerandfasting.com/index.php?p=1_17

There will also be daily prayer services during the 40 days, initially at Liverpool Uniting Church and then at the time of Assembly at Maughan Uniting Church, in Adelaide. These midday services will include a sung communion and prayers of anointing for healing and will be led by a team from Liverpool Uniting Church. All people are welcome to these prayer meetings. Following the service there will be a light lunch to break fast together.

Rev Dr. Andrew Dutney writes

"I commend this "40 Days of Life Overflowing" to you and invite you to join me in attending to the heart of the church's business – in prayer."

So join with Andrew, and join with us in the heart of the church's business – in prayer.

Rev Anne Hibbard Minister of the Word, Liverpool Uniting Church

Assembly proposals on marriage

Already at least four proposals from presbyteries regarding marriage have been submitted to the Assembly. Given the context in Australian society and the relentless push for same-sex marriage, marriage is shaping up as the main issue for the 13th Assembly. The early proposals are included here for your information. There is usually a process of negotiation to see if similar proposals can be amalgamated, and no doubt there will be more proposals from Assembly members closer to the time. For more up-to-date information about marriage-related proposals you can check out the 13th Assembly website. Other information from ACC will be included in the July e-news.

1: Port Phillip West

Crosslight (Victorian and Tasmanian Newspaper) reported in May 2012 on a proposal from the Presbytery of Port Phillip West that "seeks Assembly's commitment to developing a UCA position on same gender marriage. The proposal asks Assembly to resolve to request the Doctrine Working Group, in consultation with the Worship Working Group and Uniting Justice, to prepare a discussion paper on the Uniting Church theology of marriage; whether this theology enables the celebration and blessing of lifelong, faithful, same-sex relationships as 'marriages', or whether the Uniting Church should seek to develop another way of celebrating and blessing life-long, faithful, same-sex relationships. Port Phillip West requests that this paper, with appropriate recommendations, be presented to a 2014 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee."

2: South Moreton

Proposal Regarding Marriage – A call to the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia to act. (Rev. Lulu Senituli and Rev. David Kym)

1. That the Presbytery of South Moreton call the National Assembly to:

a. publicly reaffirm its current position on marriage as being between a man and woman as stated in the 1997 National Assembly¹.

b. reject any liturgies such as being used for same-sex blessing services that seek to mimic, undermine and deconstruct marriage.

c. remind Synods and Presbyteries that the discipline of the church must be exercised if a minister:

i) advocates doctrine contrary to that which the Church has determined essential to the faith; [UCA Regulations 7.8.1]

ii) fails to up hold the theological and the liturgical tradition of the Church [code of ethics 3.2 (b)]

d. participate with our ecumenical partners and other Christian denominations and organisations² in advocating for the Christian view of marriage in the public square.

2. That the Presbytery of South Moreton write to all presbyteries and Synods asking them to also prayerfully consider adopting this proposal.

Rationale:

In the light of:

- a) the same-sex wedding blessing ceremony that occurred on the 12 June 2010 at the Brunswick Uniting Church in Melbourne;
 - b) the nature of the liturgy³ being used not only mimics marriage, but also seeks to undermine and deconstruct the institution;
 - c) the secrecy surrounding this ceremony in terms of it being unsanctioned by the Presbytery, Synod or Assembly;
 - d) the push by Uniting Network to have the same-sex union liturgy adopted at the July 2012 National Assembly;
 - e) there being no disciplinary action taken by the Church tantamount to an unauthorised liturgy being accepted and practised by the UCA by stealth;
 - f) the confusion within the UCA regarding the UCA's position on marriage created by this ceremony as well as the increasing number of ministers that have come to light that are living in same-gender and *de facto*⁴ relationships;
 - g) sadness and disappointment from our migrant ethnic congregations and their home churches;
 - h) the continued division and schism that this issue is causing;
 - i) confusion in our local communities regarding the UCA's position⁵;
 - j) the blatant and embarrassing non-participation of the UCA in the recent public inquiry by the 'Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' commissioned by the House of Representatives - April 12, 2012 regarding the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012⁶;
- we believe the presbytery should adopt the following proposal.

1 "The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declares that Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service

- the woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
- the couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
- the Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together. In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society" [1997 assembly minute 97.31.12].

2 For example Family Voice and The Christian lobby

3 Uniting Network Liturgy <http://www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au/resources/Sacred%20Union%20Ceremony%20REVISED%20FINAL%2030%20Sept%202010.pdf>

4 This year 2012, the NQ Presbytery recently ordained a minister living in a de facto relationship.

5 Failure of the President of the UCA to advocate clearly the Church's view on marriage on ABC Radio National <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/>

Noting our ecumenical partners were involved and strongly advocated for the Christian Understanding of Marriage, i.e. Catholic, Anglican

and Lutheran Church, Salvation Army Church, Seventh-day Adventist were also involved as well as Christian organisations such as Family Voice and the Christian Lobby. UCA was not represented. The only time the UCA was mentioned was when a reference was made to the Rev. Dorothy McRae-McMahon and her partner as evidence for why same-sex marriage should be adopted by the government (p.48). Full transcript of hearing can be downloaded here: [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commrep/d4627e5a-48ef-42e7-9297-d772ce9bdf14/toc_pdf/Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs_2012_04_12_957.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=committees/commrep/d4627e5a-48ef-42e7-9297-d772ce9bdf14/0000](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commrep/d4627e5a-48ef-42e7-9297-d772ce9bdf14/toc_pdf/Standing%20Committee%20on%20Social%20Policy%20and%20Legal%20Affairs_2012_04_12_957.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=committees/commrep/d4627e5a-48ef-42e7-9297-d772ce9bdf14/0000)

3: Tasmania

The Presbytery of Tasmania recommends to the 2012 Assembly that

(a) the Doctrine and Worship Working Groups and the Social Justice Working Group produce a discussion paper on a theology of same-sex relationships and unions in the light of the Basis of Union.

(b) the papers be circulated to congregations of the UCA, schools and agencies for discussion before June 2014, and response by December 2014.

Rationale:

1. Background papers to the sexuality reports (1995-6) have not addressed any potential conflicts with the Basis of Union.
2. The 1997 Assembly introduced a new clause 2 to the constitution requiring the Church to be guided by its Basis of Union.
3. The 1997 Assembly approved the statement on Marriage as being between a man and a woman, the Assembly did not adopt "right relationships" for same-sex relationships.

Hence it is time to produce a discussion paper of the nature described in the motion.

[N.B. The actual wording may be slightly different. The motion has been reconstructed from notes. The motion was moved by Katherine Abetz and seconded by Barrie Robinson (or Keeton Miles). It passed by consensus on 5th May 2012.]

4: North Queensland

Proposal regarding Marriage:

(a) That the Presbytery of Nth Qld affirm the UCA's received teaching on marriage, clearly contained in the Church's marriage liturgy (UIW2), 1997 Assembly statement on marriage (see B.), and outlined in the Assembly docbyte on marriage (<http://assembly.uca.org.au/docbytes>)

(b) That the Presbytery of Nth Qld issue an appropriate media statement (processed via Synod Uniting Communications) upholding the Uniting Church's National Assembly affirmation of marriage (1997 assembly minute 97.31.12):

"The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declares that Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

UCA MEETS

In the marriage service:

- the woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
- the couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
- the Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together.

In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.”

C. That local church councils be encouraged to uphold the teaching of the Church by noting the Presbytery’s statement in their local community as is appropriate.

Rationale:

Despite the clear teaching of the church catholic, and the UCA’s received doctrine regarding marriage, the UCA’s national assembly and its president, in our opinion, have consistently failed to publicly uphold the teaching of the Church. In fact it could be argued that the opposite is true. This situation at the national level has effect at our local level. (e.g. Radio National Interview with Andrew West *Same Sex Marriage and the Challenge to the Churches* “<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religion-andethicsreport/>)

For the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes redemption from sexual sin and brokenness in family, we wish to unashamedly uphold the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

We believe issues of sexual identity, sexual expression and practice will continue to be key touch points for our proclamation of Christian hope and evangelism into the coming decade. Our current political and cultural climate makes this a very timely issue for us to take up in an appropriate public manner.

There are many that regard the UCA as a “Gay Church” meaning that we have departed from the understanding and practice of marriage according to the biblical witness, and affirmed by Jesus and the Apostles.

We do not believe the Gay agenda so prevalent in almost every form of current secular media, and presented under the various forms of marriage equality and equal rights is good for individuals, families and our nation. We believe the Uniting Church has a key role to play.

We are asking for the Presbytery to affirm this key teaching of the Church for the sake of the world. Part B. of the proposal does not ask for the assembly minute quoted above to be the presbytery media statement, but that the Presbytery prepares an appropriate statement upholding the teaching of the Church.

This would likely be developed by the PLT. We understand that such a media statement must be processed through the Synod’s Uniting Communications of which Mardi Lumsden is the director. I have spoken to her about this today to confirm.

We consider that for the Presbytery to make such a statement publicly will be of great benefit to our local proclamation and care for people.

Key newspapers could be contacted and our statement provided. It may open further opportunity for the UCA in Nth Qld to be “at the top” in our desire to live in the blessing of God and share that with those around us.

ACC submission to the Inquiry into Marriage Equality bill

Reverend Dr Max Champion, ACC National Director and Peter Bentley, Executive Consultant represented the ACC at the 3 May Public Hearing in Sydney for the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee for the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010. The ACC submission is Number 144.

The Bill seeks to amend the Marriage Act 1961 “to remove discriminating references based on sexual orientation and gender identity; and allow marriage regardless of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity”.

UCA position on marriage (1997)

Marriage is a special covenant (which) “is the freely given consent and commitment in public before God of a man and a woman to live together for life.”

(It) is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and a man expressed in every part of their life together (in which) they ‘seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.’ ... In their sexual union “... the partners seek to express their mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together; ... children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.” ... Marriage is also “the unique sign of the unity which is promised in Christ.”

This position has been repeated publicly by President Alistair Macrae on many occasions.

Comments on the Concept of ‘Equality’

The term ‘Marriage Equality’ is misused in relation to same-sex relationships. The complementary structure of the body, as male or female, and its marital purpose in creating and nurturing life and forming community, clearly demonstrates that, contrary to the presupposition of the proposed Act, there is ‘no equivalence’ between same-sex sexual relations and marital relations between men and women.

This position, which has strong theological roots in Jewish and Christian Scriptures, can also be argued on the basis of common ethical reason – as advanced by Canadian ethicist, Margaret Somerville (*The Case Against “Same-Sex Marriage,”* 2003) and S. Girgis, Robert P. George and Ryan T. Anderson, in ‘What is Marriage?’, (*Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* Vol 34 (1) 2011, pp. 245-287.

They argue that it is not discriminatory (and thus not a violation of human rights) to insist that marriage between men and women must receive special

legal protection because it alone of all sexual relations connects the welfare of children with their biological creation.

It is instructive that the European Court of Human Rights and the French National Assembly have both rejected the idea that the restriction of marriage to the relation between a man and a woman is a violation of the human rights of same-sex couples who wish to marry.

The French can hardly be accused of being bigoted in matters of sexuality! The 142 page Report to the French Parliament (No. 2832) highlighted Articles 3, 7, 9, 18 & 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and said that, because children represent the future of society, they should “not suffer as a result of situations imposed on them by adults.

“The interests of the child must outweigh the exercise of freedom by adults ... whatever life choices are made by parents.”

Marriage is a special covenant (which) ‘is the freely given consent and commitment in public before God of a man and a woman to live together for life.’

French law allows for three forms of organisation for couples: Common law, Civil unions, Marriage. Each has its own set of proportionate rights and obligations. “Marriage is thus not only the contractual recognition of a couple’s love. It is a demanding framework with rights and obligations designed to welcome the child and provide for his or her harmonious development.”

Because of the filiative nature of marriage (the fact of being the child of certain parents), it is essential that the male-female nature of marriage be preserved.

This “corresponds to the biological reality – the infertility of same-sex couples – and the vital need to construct an identity for the child necessarily resulting from the union of a man and a woman.”

Implications:

1. The argument that ‘a biological relationship between parent and child isn’t essential to raising a healthy child’ (Charlotte Patterson, *Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents*, 1992) and the claim that same-sex marriage ‘strengthens families and gives greater stability for children’ (Hercovick S249; cites one article by Lee Badgett) are misleading.

a. More refined quantitative research is needed. In their analysis of articles and research papers, Robert Lerner & Althea Nagai, in *No Basis: What the Studies Don’t Tell Us about Same Sex Parenting* (The Marriage Law Project, Washington 2001) conclude that insufficient variables were taken into account in assessing results; same-sex households were usually compared only with single parent homes (not traditional families); and little evidence was produced to conclude that there were ‘no significant differences’ or to determine which scored higher or lower on a range of indices (eg education, class, income, family).

In the French Report, studies claiming that there were no negative effects on children raised by same-sex couples ‘were widely criticised and disputed at the hearings ... the lack of objectivity in this area was blatant.’

b. The long-term effect of legalising marriages which, by definition, cannot fulfil the reproductive function of marriage, may cause social problems akin to those now experienced by indigenous children placed in white families, children born through IVF and adopted children. (eg Tangledwebs)

c. Current moves to replace ‘father’ and ‘mother’ on birth certificates with ‘parent 1’ and ‘parent 2’ and the likelihood that more than two people will be named as ‘parents’ (biological, social, surrogate eg Elton John) is extremely likely to contribute to this loss of identity as children grow older.

What will be the effect of establishing a legally binding marital relationship that, from the outset, excludes one sex? In fifty years time will we be having Royal Commissions into what may then be regarded as the shameful practice of denying children the right to be born and nurtured by a mother and a father?

2. If there is assumed to be an ‘equivalence’ of ‘romantic love’ that is indifferent to self-chosen forms of sexual stimulation, then, eventually, legislation will have to be enacted to approve of polyamory, polygamy and adult incest (provided that, in all cases, mutual consent is safeguarded).

If that is the direction favoured by the Parliament then social chaos will inevitably follow. If this spurious concept of ‘equality’ succeeds in this case, then, in principle, there can be no end to the re-definition of ‘marriage.’

3. The argument that traditional marriage laws (Marriage Act 1961), which exclude same-sex partners, are equivalent to laws banning interracial marriage is fallacious.

Sex, unlike race/ethnicity, is relevant to what constitutes marriage. Anti-miscegenation laws were a wicked denial of human rights precisely because, in the interests of white supremacy, they forbade the union of male-female relationships which are constitutive of marriage.

• Impact on Migrant-Ethnic and Indigenous members of the community

1. Multiculturalism: We have large numbers of migrants from Africa, Asia, Middle East and the Pacific. They represent diverse cultural, social and religious traditions. For most of them same-sex sexual relationships are culturally (and religiously) taboo because they defy the clear evidence of nature.

2. Indigenous Australians: Likewise, same-sex sexual relations are culturally (and religiously) taboo. The UAICC of the UC Assembly (2006) has consistently opposed the acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships in the church.

Both groups are already marginalised in the Australian community. Their silence in public debates should not be construed as consent to ‘Marriage Equality.’

Many are unable to speak publicly, feeling intimidated by the aggression of media-savvy activists who argue on the unfamiliar ground of individual rights.

What will be the impact on social and cultural harmony if the Australian Parliament legalises marriage between same-sex partners? The possibility of widespread social unrest shouldn’t be underestimated!

The Good Shepherd

A sermon by Rev Dr Max Champion at St John's UCA Mt Waverley, Vic

Lessons – Ezekiel 34:1,2,10,11; Psalm 23; Hebrews 13:20,21; John 10:11-18 Thus says the Lord: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. (Ezekiel 34:11) Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' (John 10:11,15,17) The God of peace ... brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the sheep ... (Hebrews 13:20)

The pastoral image of the 'Good Shepherd' is so familiar. The shepherd psalm is the best-loved passage in the Bible. In art Jesus is often portrayed sentimentally as a gentle shepherd holding cuddly lambs, the focus being on the comfort that a caring God brings whenever we are unhappy. We have come to think of 'pastoral care' as calming personal fears and resolving congregational disputes by consensus. A good 'pastor' gives comfort to all, avoids conflict and maintains harmony at any cost!

This picture of 'pastoral ministry' owes more to 'therapeutic models of counselling' that help us adjust to the world, than to biblical 'models of discipleship' that unsettle and encourage us to live fully in the world. It is not that God is uninterested in our troubles. Far from it! The Good Shepherd upholds us in times of suffering and death. But he is also the One who guides us in the ways of mercy and righteousness, calls bad leaders to account, and encourages us to be steadfast in the face of serious threats to faith, hope and love.

The 'Good Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep' is unlike any other figure. His sacrificial commitment to the human race is unequalled in history!

There is nothing cuddly about the 'shepherd' in Scripture! David, the shepherd-King, boldly defends the faithful. Prophets like Ezekiel risk life and reputation to speak out against false shepherds! (Ezekiel 34.) God is the protector of the persecuted (Psalm 23) who goes in search of lost sheep (Matthew 18:10-14; Luke 15:4-7). The vulnerable little flock can live in hope because nothing can ultimately thwart the just and gracious purposes of the Good Shepherd.

The setting in which Jesus spoke about the Good Shepherd helps us see what it means to be truly 'pastoral'.

The Festival of Hanukkah (John 10:22) was being held to commemorate the re-dedication of the Temple by

Judas Maccabeus in 165 BC. It had been desecrated by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV. Sacrifices to Zeus were made on the altar. Pagan practices had displaced worship of God. Judas Maccabeus led a bloody revolt against the strong Greek army and, against the odds, prevailed. Being 'pastoral' meant opposing idolatry and inhumanity and defending the faith.

As part of the service of thanksgiving, the words of Ezekiel were read: 'Prophesy against the shepherds of Israel ... say to them ... you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves. Should not shepherds feed the flock instead of their own egos? (34:6.)'

At Hanukkah, when people remembered both the sacrifices of good pastors and the timidity and faithlessness of many bad pastors, Jesus speaks of being the Good Shepherd. In his ministry we see that the truly Good Shepherd seeks the lost and rejoices when sinners and outcasts are welcomed and demonic forces are overcome.

"This Good Shepherd even lays down his life for the sheep" – a point emphasised four times (John 10:11,15,17). Not only does he stand against evil on behalf of his flock but he goes to death in an act of sacrificial love unlike any other. Moreover, as Hebrews says, his crucifixion is not the end of the matter. The Good Shepherd is raised from the dead (Hebrews 13:20). Unexpectedly, incredibly, the goodness and mercy of God triumphed over evil and death.

Idylic images are foreign to the biblical picture of shepherds. It was tough, dangerous work! Shepherds often had to take their sheep through dark, treacherous valleys to get to the "green pastures" and "waters of rest". Psalm 23 encourages those whose faith is being sorely tested by stiff opposition. The Good Shepherd leads the vulnerable flock away from peril, protects them from harm and sees that they are refreshed and encouraged to face another tough day on faith's path.

Being good shepherds was a difficult but vital task in the community of faith. Sadly, it was common for pastors to mislead the flock and use their position to 'feed themselves' – to starve the people of righteousness and mercy and to feed their own egos (Ezekiel 34:2).

It was no less true in Jesus' time, as we see in the Gospel. Jesus highlights the sacrificial nature of his 'pastoral ministry' (three times) and attacks the 'faithless pastors' of his day as thieves, robbers, mercenaries (four times). It is no small thing for entrusted leaders to turn from God's righteousness and mercy, teach whatever they like and behave however they choose!

It is clear then that pastoral ministry is about much more than treating aches and pains. We must be ready for challenges and temptations that come from being disciples. Like the prophets and Jesus we must not shrink from exposing charlatans so that our fellows will hear the Gospel.

We are facing huge challenges in pastoral ministry today. Christian faith is being attacked by forces not un-



like those faced by the ancient Jews and early Christians. Instead of Christian faith transforming pagan culture as it did in earlier times, Christianity is now being transformed by beliefs and practices that are alien to the Jewish-Christian heritage.

Indeed, many 'pastors' now believe that 'there are many ways to reach divine reality, that the Christian revelation is but one expression of faith, that Christ is one Saviour among many and that we can find God or our own divinity by looking within ourselves'. Many in the church believe that self-fulfilment and personal growth, not God's righteousness and mercy, are the goal of life. We prefer the cuddly Jesus, who shields us from hardship, to the Good Shepherd who binds our wounds and sends us back into battle.

We are dealing with dark forces that seek to undermine the Church's faith in Christ. Being 'pastoral' therefore means standing up against charlatans peddling false comfort in order to 'feed their own egos'! Alas, too many shepherds and flocks have become too timid to rise to the challenge of this critical aspect of pastoral ministry. We prefer gentle Jesus meek and mild (who expects nothing of us) to the Good Shepherd who, having suffered discomfort on the Cross, triumphed over evil and called men and women to walk the joyful, yet often uncomfortable, path of costly discipleship.

Too often, shepherds and flocks have learned to 'live and let live' on small and large matters alike. To heck with the Gospel of costly grace! Avoid conflict at any cost! Be 'pastorally sensitive' and let incompatible beliefs-and-practices on the substance of the faith sit comfortably side by side. Better to respect diverse beliefs and life-styles, maintain long-standing friendships and manage dissent than to be passionate disciples of Christ!

This approach to being 'pastoral' has done and is doing irreparable harm to the Church's calling. It has encouraged us not to think of ourselves as belonging to a community called into being to bear witness to the world that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Because of that we do not see the importance of challenging the shallow relativism that pervades our society in the name of the righteousness and mercy embodied in Jesus.

Today's readings remind us that, no matter what the cost, we are called to proclaim the truth. The love of God for flawed humans like you and me is displayed in the Good Shepherd whose costly love for all has been decisively displayed in the cross-and-resurrection! In Christ, therefore, we see (in a unique, wonderful and totally unexpected way) the righteousness and mercy of the Good Shepherd who led, challenged and renewed the Hebrew people.

Our pastoral duty is to set forth the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The 'Good Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep' is unlike any other figure. His sacrificial commitment to the human race is unequalled in history! Because of him our worship, preaching, teaching and visiting is to reflect what it means to be disciples of Christ: the Good Shepherd who lay down his life and was raised to life for the sake of all his wayward sheep (John 10:16).

The question for the Church is whether we want to exercise this kind of pastoral care. Do we want 'comfort' for ourselves or 'comfort' that refreshes us so that we are emboldened to spread the word of hope to lost souls and to stand up to charlatans peddling a self-centred faith?

If this seems too hard, remember that there is a festive element to pastoral ministry. In Psalm 23 the Good Shepherd watches over the sheep that, after a tough day threatened by dangers on every side, feed on lush pasture and drink fresh water. Remember too that the Good Shepherd, who lay down his life for his friends, fed the hungry, ate and drank with tax-collectors and sinners, compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a banquet and instituted the Supper of bread and wine as a perpetual sign of his presence with the Church.

The seriousness of our pastoral calling flows from the joy of knowing that the Good Shepherd is the God whose costly and triumphant love for flawed human beings and our strife-torn world has been supremely embodied in Christ's life, death and resurrection as the sign that in future all that threatens life and faith shall be defeated!

Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip us with every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

Dr Champion is Chair of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA.

Worship, Community and Grace

Review of *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* by James Torrance (1996) 125 pages.

In this slim but meaty volume on worship, Torrance makes two major distinctions:

The first is between unitarian and trinitarian worship and the second is between the concepts of Contract God and Covenant God. He also focuses on the need for worship to be in the context of a church community, and on the significance of the sole priesthood of Christ and his ongoing work on our behalf.

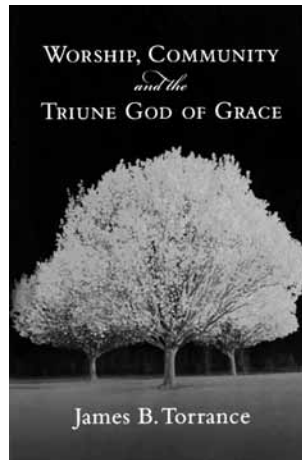
Torrance sees unitarian worship as a very common and widespread style of worship, as basically human-centred and as something that we (that is, religious people) do in church on Sunday. His description of unitarian worship is quite illustrative of what he means and is worth quoting:

“We sit in the pew, watching the minister ‘doing his thing’, exhorting us ‘to do our thing’ until we go home thinking that we have done our duty for another week” (p.20). Unitarian worship “emphasises our faith, our decision, our response ... It ignores the fact that God has already provided for us that response which alone is acceptable to him – the offering made for the whole human race, in the life, obedience and passion of Christ” (p.29).

Torrance, however, argues that the way we worship God must reflect who God truly is: the triune God of grace. In this trinitarian view, worship “is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father” (p.20).

Trinitarian worship “also means participating in what he (Christ) is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world” (p.21). In his discussion of this point, Torrance focuses on the priesthood of Christ who intercedes for us before God in the way that the High Priest interceded for the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement.

What becomes clear in Torrance’s writing is that unitarian worship



Worship “is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father”

tends to focus on us and our contribution, whereas trinitarian worship focuses on the triune God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ and who works in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Torrance reinforces the importance of this focus on the triune God. “At the centre of the NT stands not our religious experience, not our faith or repentance or decision (however important these are) but a unique relationship between Jesus and the Father”(p.30).

Torrance argues that there are three different theological models related to these two types of worship: the Liberal Protestant model which is unitarian, the “Existential, Present-day Experience model” which he sees as unitarian in tendency and practice and the “Incarnational Trinitarian model” which is the only model that is truly trinitarian. These three models are illustrated with diagrams that I did not find particularly helpful.

Torrance discusses the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism, always emphasising what God does through these sacraments rather than what we as worshippers do.

For example in the unitarian model “Baptism becomes an outward sign of my faith, my decision, my conversion, my dying and rising (my subjective sanctification)”. But it is not my faith or decision that cleanses me but Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross.

The whole focus of the book is on the work of God and his grace towards us, toward frail and sinful humans who can only come to God because of what he has already done for them in Jesus Christ, bringing us to the distinction between our Covenant God of grace and the conception of God as a Contract God. Torrance emphasises that God does not forgive us because we repent but our repentance is a response to what God has already done for us in Christ – in other words, our response is to his grace. I came away from this book with a clear message “It’s all God”.

To illustrate the point that it’s all of God, Torrance describes his dealings with the elderly son of a Presbyterian minister. This man, whose wife of 45 years was dying with cancer, was finding prayer impossible and admitted that he was frightened of a future without his wife and without faith. Torrance assures this distressed man that Christ understands his struggle and is already interceding for him before God. He also tells this man that none of us really knows how to pray and points him to Romans 8:26ff where we are assured that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we can’t find the words to pray. This couple came to know the gift of grace before the wife died - not through anything they did or anything that James Torrance did, but because of the grace of the triune God whom we worship.

This is not a new book (published in 1996) but I enjoyed it immensely and received a deeper understanding of what is meant by the grace of God. I’m sure it will prove a fitting introduction to the topic of our next ACC conference in Adelaide in September when our theme will be “The Heart of Worship”.

Patricia Noller Ph.D

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

Our goals include

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
 - calling the Uniting Church to

determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

- calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

- providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

- developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

- establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

- To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

What happens next

- June 24: Hunter Cluster meeting (Peter Bentley Speaker)
- July 15-21: 13th UCA Assembly Adelaide.
- July 30: ACC National Council Meeting (teleconference)
- September 13-15: ACC National Conference - Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide

ON THE WEB

Two websites for you.

1. *confessingcongregations.com*

The ACC website recorded its millionth page hit in April 2012. The website is primarily there for our members and provides a wide-range of resources and devotional material. Major sections include:

- History, Foundational Documents – learn about the establishment of the ACC and the antecedent groups
- Commissions – all the ACC Commissions have a page
- Sermons: Max Champion and Rob Tann provide sermons.
- There are three dedicated devotional and pastoral sections: Bob Imms (Tasmania) – Seeds for Harvesting (all congregations have received a collected volume of Bob's devotions in 2012)
- Ted Curnow (Victoria) – Pastoral and Practical – articles about faith.
- Perry Smith (NSW) – Living for Jesus drawing on Perry's long ministry.
- The ACCatalyst magazine is also available to download (back issues) and there is an index .
- The growing Culture Connections section has areas on Books, Contemporary Issues and Film and Media

2. *unitingviews.com*

The resources section provides resources and comments from ACC members (and also some non-members who have sympathy with the ACC). A significant section is devoted to the constitution and preamble of the UCA. The other two sections at present provide material on The Future of the Uniting Church (especially outlining the liberal development of the UCA) and Marriage.

- Some sample articles in the Marriage Section

Families and Healthy Teenagers:

Patricia Noller, Emeritus Professor, School of Psychology, University of Queensland - a short paper on how certain young people are also the ones most likely to follow their parents' Christian values and come into a relationship with Christ.

Families and God: Rod James outlines the nature of and significance of covenant in relation to marriage and families.

The Future of Marriage in the UCA: Peter Bentley comments on changes to marriage and issues within the context of the Uniting Church.



Jean Dujardin and Bérénice Bejo in *The Artist*

Homage to silence

The Artist (PG, 2011)

The Artist not only won the Oscar for Best Film this year, but also awards for directing, costume design, original music score, and Best Actor for French actor Jean Dujardin as silent film star George Valentin. This film has also collected many other awards and now has the record for the most Césars for any French film. While *The Artist* is quite fun to watch, it is a one-off novelty movie, given it is a [mostly] silent film. I believe its recognition has been more to do with this, and the fact in the Academy Awards there are now more movies in the line-up for Best Picture and it is difficult for any film to win unless it totally dominates the Academy's imagination.

The Artist is really a homage to the silent film era and in that sense is nostalgic for a different Hollywood era. I thought Jean Dujardin's comment about film itself was illuminating. "I discovered that silent film is almost an advantage. You just have to think of the feeling for it to show. No lines pollute it. It doesn't take much - a gaze, an eyelash flutter - for the emotion to be vivid."

The story reminded me of some elements of my favourite musical *Singin' in the Rain* as this also has a silent film star struggling with the idea of the new 'talkies'. The film plays on the idea of the 'It Girl'—aptly named Peppy Miller, who this time is well-positioned to take on the talkies and move ahead as the star for a new age. John Goodman has a great supporting role as the movie mogul and helps to illustrate how the movie industry in the developing years was very much a tight-knit community run by a benevolent dictator.

As I stated at the front, it is fun to watch, but while I could watch Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds again and again, once was enough for *The Artist*.

A Courageous Heart (M, 2009) – Also known as *The Courageous Heart of Irene Sendler*.

The story of Irene Sendler has become more well-known over the last few years, particularly through documentaries and research on Jewish children who survived in Nazi-occupied countries with the help of non-Jewish families. Irene was a member of the "Zegota Committee" (the Polish Council to Aid Jews (Polish: Rada Pomocy Żydom)), a centre for Polish resistance in German-occupied Poland from 1942 to 1945, and a leader in helping to save Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto by smuggling them out in a variety of ways. The children were also saved from death as many of their families died in the ghetto or in the concentration and extermination camps. This raised other questions after the war in terms of the question of finding and returning the children to their wider family, or keeping them in the families they had in many cases come to accept. This particular subject has been explored in various documentaries and Irene Sendler herself featured in one documentary released in 2011 *Irene Sendler, in the Name of the Mothers* in which she speaks about the pain of all the mothers. Sendler was recognised as one of the Righteous among the Nations by the Yad Vashem (the Holocaust's Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Israel) and received a number

of awards, notably very late in her life from the Polish Government. The film is a Hallmark Hall of Fame and has a strong historical setting and acting, with Anna Paquin in the lead role. Paquin is best-known for winning the Best Supporting Actress in the film *The Piano* in 1993, the second youngest winner at 11 years of age. While dealing with a distressing subject the film does not dwell on the obvious misery and difficulties in the ghetto, but simply and realistically portrays the deteriorating situation. There is also a continuing consideration of religion and faith as Jewish parents wrestle with giving up their children who they know will be raised as Catholics. Certainly the children old enough to speak learned prayers and Catholic practices principally to ensure they would not be identified as Jewish. This film is now made available on DVD through Christian sources and lends itself to many ensuing discussions.

Highway from Hell (2009)

This contemporary documentary about a group of young people in the Philippines provides an insight into the lives of a whole community and the circle of poverty that at times seems overwhelming, and the attempts of a few to show a new way by offering them a school placement in a Boystown or Girlstown. The theme of education is dominant and follows a few individuals showing this as the route out of poverty, mainly because of the better job prospects. While this is a Catholic context there is only the occasional Catholic theology context that is presented in a more defined way, and overall there is little formal consideration of the theology of the ministry, apart from the idea of helping children like Christ did and following the good works of the founder US Catholic Priest Aloysius Schwartz (1930-1992), who established schools in several countries, along with a special order, the Sisters of Mary. I could see this could be a very good documentary if it was edited down to half its length and had some of the elements of hagiography cut out (related to the founder). It is important to consider education and in particular the role of the Christian church has played. In fact, the Catholic church continues to play a critical role in the provision of hope and a new life for so many people in the world.

Peter Bentley

Peter is the Executive Consultant for the ACC