

## Assembly of Confessing Congregations: Frequently Asked Questions.

### 1. Why take this action?

Unfortunately, the decisions and processes of the UCA have not helped to uphold and strengthen classical Christian teaching. We therefore believe that it is imperative to continue to work within the UCA, but in a different way. We have taken this action for the sake of the Gospel and in order to better fulfil the purposes for which the UCA was established.

### 2. Why the name: Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC)?

The word *'Assembly'* has been chosen with the following in mind: In the past we have had an Alliance of congregations. Words such as 'alliance', 'association' or 'movement' suggest a loose fellowship of like minded people within a larger whole. But the ACC goes further than previous initiatives because of the seriousness of the situation within the Uniting Church. We believe that it is the Assembly which has acted in an apostate manner and has violated its own processes of decision making. Therefore we use the word 'Assembly', to call the Uniting Church Assembly to account for its apostasy we have avoided any words which are used in the UCA to denote a component part of the Church under its National Assembly. E.g. synod, presbytery, mission network, congress, council, or conference. The Assembly of Confessing Congregations does not fit tidily into the UCA as one component in its diversity. This is because orthodoxy that 'fits in' as one option among many is not true orthodoxy. *'Confessing'*, as the Basis of Union rightly says, means confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. This was necessary, at the time of union, so that the basis of faith in Christ was clearly articulated for the sake of the ministry and mission of the Uniting Church.

Confessing movements have a long and honourable tradition of protest within the Churches. Since the 16th century Reformation, confessional churches have affirmed their faith in opposition to what they regarded as false teaching of one kind or another. Today throughout the Western world many confessing movements have sprung up within mainline denominations. For example, membership of the Confessing Movement in the United Methodist Church of the USA is 643,223 individuals, 1,471 congregations and 4,377 clergy. In the Presbyterian Church of the USA more than 1,500 congregations representing 15% of all members belong to the confessing movement. The source of this information is a recently published book by Thomas Oden, *Turning around the Mainline: How Renewal Movements are Changing the Church* (2006) which we strongly recommend. Confessing Christ never takes place in a vacuum. It is made in the midst of a concrete threat to his lordship. A truly Confessing movement does not strive to carve out an evangelical niche within the Church but calls the whole Church to reaffirm the 'evangelical' substance' of her classical Christian faith. In acknowledging what God has done for humanity in Christ, and standing against heresy, a Confessing movement also acknowledges the complicity of her members in the situation. Thus, confessing the lordship of Christ also involves confessing one's own sin. A confessing movement, therefore, must be both bold and humble.

The failure of the 11th Assembly to affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ as attested in scripture drives us to strengthen our "confession" by gathering into an Assembly. We confess

from within an “assembly of confessing congregations”. Efforts to make our confession heard within the established councils of the Uniting Church have fallen on deaf ears. So we resolve to strengthen our confession from within The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church so that the whole UCA may again hear the clear word of Jesus Christ.

### 3. Why use a term like ‘apostasy’?

The word apostasy is derived from the Greek word *aphistémi*, and is used in the New Testament in the sense of ‘to draw away from’, ‘to depart from’ (Hebrews 3:12.). Apostasy is used here to describe the failure of the Assembly to correct false teaching on sexuality and the decision to enshrine that false teaching in the Church’s understanding of what is right and good. We reject any attempt to link the use of the word ‘apostasy’ with violent, hateful or bigoted behaviour which demeans other people, including those with whom we must disagree on this matter.

- a. It is often misquoted in official church statements to support the idea that the UCA is ‘united by diversity.’ Nowhere is that said in the Basis of Union! In fact, it insists that diversity arises from our unity ‘in Christ.’
- b. Second, it is often criticised for having a ‘liberal’ approach to the Bible. This is not so! Paragraph 5 of the Basis of Union doesn’t compromise the authority of Scripture. It strengthens the connection between Christ who is the Word of God and the testimony to the Word in the unity of the Old and New Testaments. It insists that Scripture is ‘unique prophetic and apostolic testimony’ and that faith must be ‘nourished and regulated’ and preaching ‘controlled by the Biblical witnesses.’ It challenges both liberalism and fundamentalism. The ACC is committed to confessing the faith of Christ as affirmed in the Basis of Union.

### 4. Why does the proposed Charter of the ACC speak of ‘adherence to the Basis of Union’?

Our complaint is not with the Basis of Union itself. It is a fine Reformed and Evangelical confession of faith which affirms the centrality of Christ. But, sometimes, it has been blamed for the present crisis in the UCA. There are two reasons for this:

### 5. How does the Assembly of Confessing Congregations fit within the Uniting Church Structures?

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations does not fit tidily into the UCA as one component in its diversity. This is because orthodoxy that ‘fits in’ as one option among many is not true orthodoxy. On the other hand we are persuaded that Christ’s cause is best served by confessing the Truth from within the Uniting Church, so we encourage our members to remain within the Uniting Church and to work for its reform under the Word of God. To this end we encourage our members to support everything about our Synods and Presbyteries that serves the gospel and the wellbeing of the church. Our gathering into an ‘Assembly of Confessing Congregations’ and the organization of the congregations into supportive networks will give us a place within the Uniting Church to bear a witness that is unconfused by the diversity of opinions and beliefs that beset our church.

6. How is the ACC structured?

The ACC has been structured with a National Council, six working Commissions and two administrative Boards. State Movements have been established to fulfil the objectives of the Charter in each state. See the page The Organisational Structure of the ACC for the full structure. A national office has been set up and an Executive Consultant appointed.

7. Is the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Schismatic?

It is those who introduce apostate views and decisions into the life of the Church who create schism. The ACC states its commitment to the Basis of Union, and expresses its desire to preserve the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Our concern is that the drift in the UCA towards the normalization of homosexual intercourse and its tolerance of other non-Christian beliefs will finalize its departure from the historic and ecumenical church. Our aim is to strengthen its unity with the church by encouraging it to confess Christ's teaching about the expression of our sexuality.

8. Has the ACC rejected the authority of Presbyteries, Synods and Assembly?

The ACC is not a rejection of the legitimate authority of Presbyteries and Synods. It is the Assembly which has chosen to abrogate its responsibility and its moral authority by its own decisions after numerous clear warnings and protests by RA and EMU and many other concerned members. The ACC will set an example to the Assembly of the UCA by openly sharing our intentions and vision with the grass roots members of the church. The ACC recognizes the important practical relationship that all ACC congregations have with their Synod in the areas of finance, property, insurance and administration, etc, and affirms that relationship.

- a. Faith in Jesus Christ is by nature a personal and public confession. When apostasy and unbelief abound, it is meaningful for individual Christians to publicly and personally identify with the confessing movement.
- b. When you are an individual member all ACC communications come to you directly, e.g. the ACC Newsletter and the monthly ACC Prayer Diary. You also receive the quarterly magazine, ACCatalyst.
- c. Through your individual membership subscription you are giving vital financial support to the ACC. Additional personal donations are also an important part of the ACC budget.
- d. Congregations and individuals can request formal membership using the special membership forms.

9. How can a congregation or individual join the ACC?

We encourage congregations to prayerfully consider the information the ACC provides with an open mind. We believe that this is a matter of discernment in which congregations need to make decisions they believe honour God. Any congregation wishing to join the ACC needs to go through an appropriate decision making process which considers what the ACC stands for and whether the congregation believes it is called to be a part of this confessing movement.

Individuals can also join the ACC. There are three important reasons for becoming an individual member of the ACC, even if your congregation has joined:

- a. Faith in Jesus Christ is by nature a personal and public confession. When apostasy and unbelief abound, it is meaningful for individual Christians to publicly and personally identify with the confessing movement.
- b. Supporting Members receive all ACC communications directly to their nominated address and e-mail, e.g. the ACC Newsletter and the monthly ACC Prayer Diary. You also receive the quarterly magazine, ACCatalyst.
- c. Through your Supporting Membership subscription you are giving vital financial support to the ACC. Additional personal donations are also an important part of the ACC budget.

10. What does it cost to join the ACC?

The annual membership subscription for a congregation is calculated as \$10 per congregational member. E.g. if your congregation has 30 members the annual congregational membership is \$300. There is a ceiling of \$2,000 for larger congregations. The individual membership subscription is \$50 per individual, couple or household. There is a 50% concession if needed.

- a. Where there are eight or more such people in a non-ACC congregation they can form an ACC group within the congregation. Such groups are recognized by the ACC.
- b. Where there is a region with a number of non-ACC congregations, an ACC regional cluster can be formed consisting of ACC individual members, who remain members of their present congregations. The regional cluster may agree to meet monthly or bi-monthly for a mid-week meeting, or a Sunday evening regional service.
- c. Where there is an ACC congregation located nearby, affiliation with that congregation may be possible, while remaining in one's own congregation.
- d. Where ACC supporters live in an area where there is no ACC congregation they may desire to create a new ACC congregation. Such congregations can be formed with the help of the wider ACC network.

11. Is there a place in the Assembly of Confessing Congregations for people whose congregation does not join?

In a word, 'Yes'. While the basis of the ACC is congregations, it is well recognized that many RA and EMU supporters belong to congregations with a diversity of theological and ethical views. For some it will not be possible to join an ACC congregation, and some may feel a sense of call to remain where they are. The following opportunities have been created for people who wish to belong to the ACC while remaining in a non-ACC congregation (see also answers to 9 and 10. For individual membership forms, [click here](#)).

12. Why form another Group?

The ACC has replaced EMU and will replace RA. Both groups were formed in protest to the direction of the UCA and focused their energy in trying to bring about change using the existing structures of the church. EMU has disbanded and directed its energies and resources

into establishing the ACC. The RA will need to continue for the time needed to deal with the issues raised in its legal advice re Assembly decisions. This is now its main function.

Unlike the RA and EMU, with which congregations were affiliated, The Assembly of Confessing Congregations is about these congregations gathering together—nationally as an Assembly and in each state as a Network of congregations—to make their confession in a way that is clear within the Uniting Church and that is up-building to the congregations themselves.

13. Why get involved in church politics?

Many in the Uniting Church are weary and wary of ‘church politics’. The Assembly of Confessing Congregations is not a political strategy, but rather a theological and moral act of service to the whole Church. As such we are not adversarial towards Uniting Church leaders and councils, but are their servants, faithfully and humbly bearing witness to the truth of God. In the end, divisive political strategies can never prevail in the church of God, while faithful servanthood in confessing the truth cannot but prevail.

In times of apostasy many are heard to say ‘I do not want to have anything to do with all of this—it is too confusing, it will never happen here. Why can’t we ignore all of this and just meet and worship like we have always done’. We need to understand that apostasy and confessing are part of the regular life of the Christian church. God allows apostasy because it creates the occasion where the true faith can be boldly and clearly confessed by fearless and true believers.

*These answers to frequently asked questions have been prepared by the ACC Steering Committee in August 2006, and updated by the ACC National Council in July 2007.*