

## **The Crossroad Summary Statement**

The church lives by the revealed truths entrusted to the people of God through history and through the person and presence of the Living Christ.

Two different and **contrasting ways** of how the Uniting Church currently interprets the historic faith and revelation entrusted to each generation is set out below.

### **The Church, Doctrine and Theology**

#### **The ACC Way**

(a) The Basis of Union is understood as an important, foundational statement regulating the life of the Uniting Church. It is an expression of the historic apostolic faith, and as a representative defining and missional document that when respected, provides direction and embodies our rich Christian heritage.

Directions into the future according to orthodoxy needs to be guided by a loyalty to Christ, and a sound, scholarly biblical interpretation that is subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. By its nature it provides a dynamic, missional, evangelical, and discerning outlook. In the Uniting Church those sharing this conviction are increasingly seen as an extreme minority, a marginalised group, known as the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, ACC.

#### **Coalitions within the UC**

(b) The Basis of Union is understood as a significant document but it is not regarded as a defining statement. In light of contemporary social change the Basis of Union is seen as temporary, dated and in need of a different, flexible, interpretation that more readily accommodates a range of beliefs and cultures.

Directions into the future need to be flexible and to readily interpret difference in order to be relevant, contemporary and inclusive. With a liberal interpretation of core Christian beliefs and a justice agenda this approach draws upon and actively supports a range of current social/cultural ideologies in order to progress the church. This view regards traditional faith-thinking as prejudiced, entrenched, regressive and often anti-social. In the Uniting Church this approach is promoted by Coalitions that advance LGBTI interests without qualification and other special-interest, socio-political lobby groups.

### **The Polarising Response**

Both groups (a) and (b) have been vulnerable and exploited by the emotional extremes that have surrounded the recent national debate about marriage. Both groups have attracted marginal, passionate people who have been accused of being advocates of hate. Both groups have experienced a sense of deep grief, known social rejection, and have felt or shared in some form of hostility.

After years of limited specific teaching about the basics of their faith many traditional church attenders who respect the church wonder what the current fuss is all about, while others just prefer to avoid controversy. Some are reluctantly leaving the Uniting Church rather than coping with the stress of disagreeing with the church and its pluralistic decisions, whilst others have felt judged and repressed by society, including parts of the church itself.

There are militant advocates for change both within our society and the institution and fabric of the church, advancing what some regard as social justice and compassion, these people now feel emboldened and affirmed by what they now regard as a popular, humanitarian/Christian cause that advocates progress, love and acceptance.

With limited resources the ACC seeks to speak specifically and prophetically to the dominant councils of the church. However, Uniting Church leaders and Councils of influence have unofficially adopted a strategy of collective silence (non-response) towards those advocating traditional faith-values and concerns. Since the national debate about marriage a more recent hostile attitude accuses non-compliant people of impeding the church to the point of even encouraging once loyal supporters to now walk away from the rich heritage of the church that has nurtured them over a life time.

### **The Church Culture and Practise.**

The result/consequences of this long-term development in Uniting Church are numerous. Some of the concerning practical characteristics listed here do exist in most churches but they are pronounced and typical of a Uniting Church practise and *ethos/style* today.

**As a young Australian church that has adopted a specific type of leadership and that has largely embraced the (b) position described above, it means that over time we need to recognise that a distinct emphasis or ‘church-culture’ has shaped the thinking and direction of the Uniting Church.**

**The Bible is regarded as ancient story** and allegory rather than a defining, authoritative, revelation or Word of God. This biblical reductionism seriously affects the spirituality, life and mission of the church.

**The public showcase of worship** is varied in an attempt to suit consumer needs. Professional resources are manufactured in an attempt to supply leaders with quick inspiration. The content of hymn/song lyrics increasingly reflect a shallowness in relation to rich faith content and meaning. Politically correct story and social themes replace personal faith inspiration, experience and application.

**The significance of the Cross** of Christ is reduced to moral sacrifice. Jesus self-giving is an example/symbol to follow rather than being the gift-provision of a Saviour. The mystery of one who takes our place.

**Defining doctrines.** In its attempt to be relevant the church has been seduced by contemporary social ideologies. Historicity is downsized, revealed truth is made relative, the Holy Spirit or the resurrection as ‘event’ is dismissed to the point that some ministers modify central Christian teaching and festivals.

**The Supremacy of Christ.** Unity in diversity becomes the mantra of a pluralistic, inclusive church without direction or boundaries. Instead of ‘All one in Christ Jesus,’ many written church articles, agencies fail to mention Jesus Christ.

**Devotional development,** rather than an encouraging devotional Bible study, biblical interpretation is often relegated to the specialist scholars and to expensive academic courses.

**Ministry motivation.** Rather than regarding ‘call’ as a spiritual God given imperative to propagate the gospel, ‘call’ becomes a career opportunity to advance a personal goal and to manage a process that brings social change.

**Mission vision.** This changes from a creative proclamation and a personal, transforming good news to become largely a mandate for corporate social /political/justice.

**Evangelism as publicly** proclaiming the good-news is increasingly understood as offensive, proselytizing and inappropriate in a multi-cultural context. Dialogue and multi-faith experiences is thought to bring new enlightenment.

**Gender sensitivity** leads to sensitive language awareness. God as ‘Father,’ or God as ‘Him’ is replaced with gender neutral terms or the inclusive ‘Her.’ A priority for a softer pastoral church leadership tends to replace a directional empowering leadership.

**The church is an agent** of empathy and friendship. It is a fellowship of compassionate people compliant and loyal to an institution. It is a worthy community service organisation that has lost sight of what it means to be a faith community of transformed people bearing witness to Christ.

**Responding as a Dynamic Marginalised Minority.**

**In its published statements the ACC makes it clear that it does not seek to create schism or to reject the authority of Presbyteries or Synods. It is committed to Paragraph 5 of the Basis of Union that insists that Scripture is a ‘unique prophetic and apostolic testimony’ by which faith must be ‘nourished and regulated’ and preaching ‘controlled by the Biblical witness’. Sadly however by its own decisions, tolerance and normalising of non-Christian beliefs, the Uniting Church has separated itself from the historic and ecumenical church.**

**Divisive power groups will never prevail in the long term in the church of God, so the ACC does not seek to be a managed political strategy--- but in the face of hostility it seeks to humbly bear witness to the truth of God through the ages.**

In light of this, where people and Congregations seek to remain faithful, attention is drawn to the following:

Find your excitement in the Living Christ rather than the outcome of power-politics.

Be patient. The new direction that came with the Reformation or the disruption and birth of Methodism did not happen quickly. Although painful, without compromise adjust to the ‘new normal’. Don’t allow frustration to boil over in a way that damages your integrity or relationships. Be ready to contest but allow space for the Holy Spirit to work.

Be bold but don’t over re-act. When we have been misunderstood or experienced an injustice the deep hurt can bring an immediate emotional response. This brings impact but it is not likely to be the best way forward.

When you speak publicly in a confronting way be as creative as possible and sure of your facts. Have a solid reasoned foundation for your case and have supportive people who will stand with you.

The Scriptures and Basis of Union still provide a sound basis for the belief of an authentic Uniting Church. Recognition of our joint union with Christ and the faith expressed in the Basis of Union is worth respect and requires our common adherence.

Build a healthy local Congregation and in love be ready to cross bridges of difference. Work in solidarity together as a corporate block. *'Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'* Eph 4:3.

Every Congregation has its own corporate identity and features. Local leaders and priorities usually define a congregation rather than the statements of national church councils. Bloom where you are planted for Christ. Be true to Christ and a vision for mission in your local context. Dream dreams, import a guest preacher or a visiting renewal or outreach team. 'As a fire exists by burning so a church exists by mission.'

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