



Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc

Assembly of Confessing Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia

Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, Proclaiming the truth, Renewing the church

Website: www.confessingcongregations.com

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

Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

Registered Office: 2 Erskineville Road, Newtown NSW 2042

ABN 73 794 518 715; ARBN 128 001 785

Incorporated in NSW INC9887628; Liability of members is limited

A Pastoral Letter from the National Council of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations

24 January 2019

Dear ACC Member Congregations, Groups and Clusters

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

We, the ACC National Council outline the following points in this letter:

1. the situation that we now find ourselves in post-UCA Assembly 2018;
2. offer a word of encouragement to all our members and congregations to 'stand firm' under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the ACC;
3. the proposed program that we will seek to implement and develop over the next three years.
4. the offer by ACC of itself as a 'replacement Assembly in matters vital to the life of your congregation'.

Context post-UCA Assembly 2018 and in the light of the failure of the church to evoke clause 39 b(i).

Sadly, the Presbytery of SA voted not to invoke clause 39 b (i) of the constitution in its January 5th 2019 meeting, which would have suspended the UCA 15th Assembly's decision on same-gender marriage until further consultation. The situation before us then is that:

- the decision of the 15th Assembly (Resolution 64) in July 2018 to vary our policy on marriage to include same gender marriage stands, and;
- 'diversity' is now formally instituted as the new 'ruling authority' within the Uniting Church.

By adopting so called 'same-gender marriage' the Assembly has contradicted the clear witness of Scripture and the Basis of Union which commits us to living and working within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The UCA Assembly has therefore approved practices that go against the natural and biological design of our bodies, which are 'the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you' (1 Cor. 6: 9).

The Assembly has formalised a 'diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings' (R64), as the new 'ruling authority' within the Uniting Church and will therefore become instituted and enshrined into every aspect of the life of the church. Those who will be unjustly judged as unwilling to live and work within this new diversity will (as is already happening), be threatened with discipline and discriminated against in terms of candidature processes for ministry, placements and presbytery support etc.

By accepting R64 the Assembly has fallen prey to the lure of the alien gospel of postmodernism where absolute truth as revealed in Scripture now gives way to 'diversity'.

Contrary to the stated aim of creating 'unity in diversity,' decision R64 is causing disunity between ministers and within Councils of the Church. Questions that are unclear include: who will decide whether a minister will be supported in placement if councils disagree with him/her? In the present climate, it is unlikely that ACC ministers and/or members will be treated with the same respect given to supporters of Assembly decision R64.

Standing firm under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the ACC

We understand the difficult decision that members and congregations have had to make in terms of leaving the Uniting Church. Paul is right when he said that 'when one part of the body suffers, every part of the body suffers with it' (1 Cor. 12:26).

It grieves us that Uniting Church leaders simply do not care when our members leave. In the President's recent pastoral letter, she has written us and our situation out of the picture as though we do not exist in the Uniting Church that she describes. The President has failed to truly listen and so understand why it is that we cannot live and work within this new diversity framework instituted by R64. It is not that we are 'unwilling' but that Scripture and the Basis of Union do not allow us. Her 'pastoral care' is thus quite unhelpful to us.

In this context, it is understandable why we would no-longer wish to remain 'within' the UCA. However, I encourage all our members to 'stand firm' under the doctrinal and spiritual oversight of the 'Assembly' of Confessing Congregations as we continue to:

- a. build our local congregations, state and regional networks, and our national and international ecumenical relationships;
- b. protest R64 of the 15th Assembly and the state of contradiction and confusion that it has placed upon the whole church. We must move forward in a way that allows us to maintain our confession within the 'one integrity' framework the Basis of Union so that we are not consumed and forced into the 'two integrities' illusion of the UCA Assembly.

As the UCA Assembly decision R64 on same-gender marriage stands, so do our resolutions that were passed by our ACC AGM in September 2018. They are included again at the end of this letter.¹

Proposed program for the ACC for the next 3 years 2019-2021

Below are some practical steps that the National Council will seek to implement over the next three years:

In terms of immediate focus, National Council will seek:

- To encourage all ACC congregations to formally adopt the ACC's 'Statement on Marriage'¹ as well as the 'ACC Declaration on Marriage and the Family'². This is to make clear not only our position on marriage, but to particularly highlight that marriage is a matter that 'enters into the substance of the faith' and why we therefore cannot live within the illusion of the two integrities model.

¹ http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/acc032_marriage_special_a5_lr.pdf

² http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/ACC_Marriage_Declaration_2016_Web_Version.pdf

- To encourage all congregations to add the ACC sign and logo to their church building, as well as adding them to their church website and newsletter. This is to clearly and publicly set ourselves apart from the direction the UCA Assembly is leading the church.
- To encourage all congregations to advise the UCA Assembly, Synod and Presbytery of their decision.

As we require extra resources to implement our work, we seek:

- To encourage member Congregations to increase their contributions to the ACC, and/or re-direct a percentage of their giving from wider UCA to the ACC to enable the ACC to increase its capacity to fulfil its goals during this critical period in the history of the church.
- To establish a 'legal reference committee' as well as a 'Legal Fund' to enable the ACC to provide legal support for ministers and local congregations, because of the increasing complex situation we find ourselves in. This will require substantial funds to carry out our required legal tasks effectively.

Our work within State Networks is critical. The National Council will therefore aim:

- to renew our State Networks by appointing State Convenors or field officers where possible so that we can network our congregations more closely and thus better able to provide pastoral care, encouragement and support for one another.
- to make all our congregations in each state visible on the website.
- to hold at least two annual ACC State Network meetings in each state, where the second meeting can be held as part of the ACC Conference as in previous years.

The ACC School of Faith will additionally focus on:

- providing resources for Congregations and individuals to read Scripture, to pray and to fast regularly. Focus must return to the authority of Scripture, and not the 'interpretation' of the scholar.
- holding at least one teaching and training event each year and in each state where possible with a focus on (a) The Basis of Union, and (b) Leadership and training for ministers, leaders and congregations regarding how to engage the church in this state of contradiction that we find ourselves in.
- lay preaching courses and providing support and mentoring for members studying at reformed and evangelical colleges (and a recommended list of colleges).
- A website providing a variety of Christian educational resources including an introductory course on The Basis of Union.

As teaching, training and equipping a generation of younger leaders is essential, particularly with the ability to lead in the modern context we find ourselves in, the NC will appoint three people to help intentionally focus on this task.

- A meeting with our ACC young adults and leaders in Sydney is being arranged in the first quarter of this year (more information to come)
- The young adults group will look at the possibility of restarting the Emerging Leaders Camp or beginning a one day national youth event each or every two years. To begin in 2020.

In terms of our Ecumenical relationships, the National Council will

- write to all our ecumenical partners inviting them to relate to the 'Assembly of Confessing Congregations' as embodying the apostolic and catholic faith expressed in the Basis of Union of the UCA.
- Visit National Conferences where possible and home churches to directly discuss the above.
- To formally invite the Korean Presbytery to become members of the ACC.

The date, location and theme for our 2019 ACC Conference and AGM has been set for the 23-25 September 2019 at Alex Park Conference Centre on the beautiful Sunshine Coast in Qld.

- Theme: "I am not ashamed of the gospel - It is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).
- Brochures with more information will be available soon.
- The 2018 ACC AGM and conference last year was a great success with nearly 300 people attending. This year we aim at sponsoring at least 100 young people to attend our camp/style conference with a program for our young people.
- We encourage local congregations to begin fundraising to help sponsor your young people.
- If any of our ACC members can sponsor one or two young people, that would be greatly appreciated. Approximate cost at this stage will be around \$250 per person which includes accommodation onsite and food.

A Time to Act

We have laid out above, as best we can at this time, the ACC's pathway and program for the foreseeable future.

According to the resolutions of the 2018 ACC AGM we now invite all ACC member congregations **who believe that their relationship with the National Assembly of the UCA has fundamentally broken down** to hold a congregational meeting and formally consider accepting the offer by ACC of itself as a 'replacement Assembly' in matters vital to the life of the congregation, i.e., in matters theological, spiritual and relational in this context. In so doing the congregation declares that it continues to be a Uniting Church congregation adhering to The Basis of Union as part of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church.

At such meetings, congregations may also decide to implement other suggestions made in this letter.

We ask for your continued prayers and support as we enter into what will be a very challenging future, but one where we will still experience, as we currently are, much joy, excitement and peace in living out our "calling" as the ACC of the UCA.

Grace and peace



Hedley Fihaki
On behalf of the National Council

Note: the decisions of the 2018 ACC AGM are included as an appendix on the next page.

ⁱ Extract of the Minutes of The Annual General Meeting of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. 17 -19 September 2018 held at Wesley Church, Wesley Mission 220 Pitt Street, Sydney

5.1 Future of the ACC: Resolved: That the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc:

- a) receive the Discussion Paper on the Future of the ACC dated 23 August 2018, and;
- b) change the words “within the Uniting Church in Australia” to “of the Uniting Church in Australia”, and that the Constitution be changed accordingly.
- c) determine that, until such time as the Assembly of the UCA repents of its apostate decisions and returns to the faith of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as that faith is described in the Basis of Union, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations humbly, and in dependence upon God alone, offers to Congregations the role of a replacement Assembly in matters vital to the life of its Confessing Congregations.
- d) encourage ACC member congregations and clusters to join an existing orthodox Presbytery that has rejected the UCA Assembly decision, and invite those presbyteries to realign themselves with the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, and;
- e) affirm the ACC National Council working with other networks seeking to establish orthodox non-geographical presbyteries for those congregations that are not part of an orthodox presbytery, and;
- f) affirm that the make-up of the ACC National Council be broadened, where the National Council considers it appropriate, to include up to three (3) members from those Presbyteries, groups and networks who have a similar purpose to the ACC regarding the direction of the UCA, and;
- g) encourage the ACC School of Faith to negotiate with like-minded evangelical theological and bible colleges in order to develop an alternative pathway for the teaching and training of candidates for ministry, ministry leaders and ministers, and;
- h) authorise the National Council to develop a support network for ACC ministers and leaders; and commit the ACC to provide support, encouragement and counsel to ministry agents, Congregations, clusters and groups who find it difficult to pursue evangelical, reformed and orthodox ministry; and,
- i) amend the ACC Constitution to accommodate Resolution 5.1 (b) along with the Amendment to Section 25.3 as outlined in Appendix A of the AGM Papers.
- j) in light of Resolutions 5.1 (b) & (c), the ACC accepts the responsibility for the spiritual and doctrinal oversight of its member Congregations; and encourages its member Congregations to advise the UCA Assembly of their Congregation’s support for this action.