



**PO Box 968, Newtown 2042**

20 July 2006

Dear Members,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing to bring you up to date with the rather hectic events surrounding the Eleventh Assembly in Brisbane, 5-11 July 2006. There is much to report.

On the question of Sexuality and Leadership the Assembly passed Resolution 108 by a vote of 173 to 48 (78.3%). It is a deeply flawed resolution and moves the Church closer to the acceptance of the ordination of practising homosexual ministers, but still without deciding the issue as a matter of Church doctrine.

R108 has a lot to say about diversity of opinions and practices but is almost silent on the significance of Christ. It refers to our unity in Jesus Christ and recognises that the issue ‘concerns our humanity in Christ.’ But it says, in effect, that the most important thing is to recognise *‘that the possibility of living with difference is a gift which Christ offers to the world’* (7c). There is nothing about the grandeur of our creation, the splendour of God’s costly, triumphant love displayed in Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection or the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit. A fuller critique of R108 will be issued shortly.

Despite being disappointed with, but not surprised by R108, we were wonderfully represented on the floor of Assembly by speakers, led by Rev Steve Estherby and Rev Hedley Fiahki, who put the case for the RA-sponsored motion firmly and reasonably and argued that the Assembly should decide the matter on the basis of the Church’s received doctrine.

They were more than adequately supported by a team of people, magnificently led by Peter Bentley, who provided them with advice, commentary, suggestions and pastoral care. The prayer team, splendidly led by the Rev Anne Hibbard, met in the chapel from 8am until nearly midnight every day to give the whole team greater confidence and support to speak the truth in the midst of what were often extremely difficult situations.

On 12 July, immediately after Assembly, a meeting of over 150 people from around Australia was held to discuss action to be taken in the light of Assembly’s resolution. In view of the UCA’s failure to uphold the faith of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, it was resolved to establish *The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA (ACC)*. It was decided to adopt the ‘Confessing Statement from the Executives of RA and EMU,’ ‘The charter of the ACC’ and the RA statement on sexuality, as the proposed founding documents of the ACC.

The word ‘Assembly’ has been chosen because the UCA Assembly is being called to account for its failure to uphold classical Christian doctrine on sexuality and because the new body will be more than a loose knit fellowship or alliance. We settled on ‘*confessing*’ because, since the Reformation, it has often been used by protest movements committed to recalling the Church to the truth of the Gospel in a particular matter of faith and doctrine.

The seriousness of our task is also indicated by the use of ‘*apostasy*’ to describe the Church’s ‘falling away from Christ.’ It is used, however, in a way that completely rejects behaviour which demeans other people, including those with whom we must disagree.

Congregations and individuals will be invited to join the ACC. In October there will be a two day conference to inaugurate the new Assembly. A Steering Committee has been appointed to make the necessary preparations for the meeting.

Some of you will be aware of the press statement put out by President of the UCA, the Rev Gregor Henderson, inviting me and the Rev Steve Estherby to discuss our plans at a meeting on Wednesday 19 July. Regrettably, he did not wait for us to reply before making a public announcement. As busy parish ministers we were unable to attend on that date. We also need time to consider and process matters arising from the post-Assembly meeting. It would have been better if the President had said that he was seeking a meeting at a mutually agreeable time. We very much hope that such a meeting can be held before the Assembly Standing Committee meets at the end of August. A lot will depend on the seriousness with which the President and the General Secretary, the Rev Terence Corkin, take our concerns.

The last Annual General Meeting of RA in July 2005 authorised the Executive to seek legal advice in relation to Resolution 84 (R84) and associated matters. It has done so. Shortly before the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly we received the advice. We were advised that R84 is invalid because it is contrary to Church doctrine and because the correct procedures was not followed. As a consequence, if the UCA persists with R84, this invalidity will have legal implications which will affect the use of Church property, the making of appointments, the holding of trust funds and other financial arrangements.

Prior to the Assembly, we notified the President, President-elect and General Secretary that we had received this advice. The General Secretary was able to read the advice and conveyed it to the President and President-elect. We very much hope that further conversations will be held and that senior officers of the Church will recognise that this invalidity will have serious consequences for the UCA.

We ask your prayers as we continue to make representation to the President and General Secretary on this important matter. We also ask your prayers for the Steering Committee and the Executive during this particularly demanding time.

Last Sunday evening July 16 on ABC Radio ‘Sunday Nights’ programme John Cleary interviewed me and the General Secretary on the UCA Assembly and the proposed formation of *The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA*. The interview can be heard at <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/> by clicking on 16/07/2006 on the preferred format (Real Media or Windows Media). Also see: <http://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/stories/s1686322.htm>

In conclusion I urge you most strongly to encourage your congregation to join the proposed Assembly of Confessing Congregations. We believe that it represents an excellent opportunity to revitalize the evangelical, reformed and orthodox faith of the Church. Naturally, you will have many questions about the new arrangements. Please don’t hesitate to contact us for further information or suggestions about the way ahead.

Grace and peace be with you all,  
 Rev Dr Max Champion  
 Chair of RA