

## Reforming Alliance – Formation. A brief history: 2003

The resolutions of the 10th Assembly in Melbourne in July 2003 regarding Ministry and Membership (84) have evoked much discussion and a wide range of response in and beyond our Church at this time.

For many members of the Uniting Church, the implications of these resolutions represented a contradiction of core beliefs and values.

Beyond sexual ethics, they raised many questions about the interpretation of scripture, the faith of the Church and the processes of the Church.

Many have been dismayed to witness the resulting crisis in many congregations. It has been distressing to observe the crisis in relationship between the UCA and migrant ethnic congregations and also between the UCA and Congress (UAICC). It is also of concern that some significant ecumenical dialogue has been threatened.

Beyond this, the decision of the Assembly not to refer the resolution on Ministry and Membership to the councils of the church for concurrence has caused great concern for many who have felt excluded from the decision making process. This sense of exclusion and disempowerment was indicated not least of all by the petition addressed to the Assembly which was signed by over 20,000 members and adherents of the UCA.

It was with this concern for the crisis in the Uniting Church's life and faith that a national summit of evangelical/orthodox leaders and theologians of the UCA was called by EMU.

Those gathered included 73 people in total.

- 34 were EMU members and 39 were not.
- 38 were ministers or lay pastors
- 2 were students at UCA theological colleges
- 18 were Anglo lay people
- 1 represented the UAICC
- 14 were from migrant ethnic congregations

As a result of this meeting a broad-based group called The Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church was formed.

Elsewhere on this website you will find statements about the beliefs and aims of The Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church in Australia.

Whilst the concerns and aims of Reforming Alliance are broad, in summary it is our hope that RA will be the link between the UCA and the large group most at risk of being lost to the Church, and will play a part both in holding the Church together and calling her to return to her reformed and evangelical heritage, faith and values as set out in the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is also the commitment of The Reforming Alliance to support those who out of conscience must leave, and to support them in their seeking of justice.

At the Summit, three different approaches emerged regarding our response to the state of the Uniting Church which we believed to be mutually enhancing. This brought to mind Ecclesiastes 4:12, "A three stranded cord is not easily broken."

As we wrestled in prayer and discussion, we became aware that all three approaches could, and should, function under the umbrella of a new group, "The Reforming Alliance within the Uniting Church" which would support, inform and resource the three strands within it.

The groups are;

1. Those who, at this point in time, feel they must stay and work wholeheartedly for change within the current structures.
2. Those who feel they must stay but move to parallel structures to bring about change e.g. working through non geographic Presbyteries etc. They see the current structures as contributing in large part to the problem but do not want to leave the UCA at this point in time.
3. Those who feel they have to leave and come out from the current structures of the UCA but will remain members of the Alliance in a mutually beneficial relationship.

These groups within the Reforming Alliance are flexible and will help people or councils to move from one group to the other as necessary. They will also function simultaneously. As the Alliance is a "new born baby", its full character will develop over the next few months. Some concrete goals however were defined at the Summit:

Almost 21,000 people signed a petition to the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) in August requesting that the issues raised in Resolution 84 of the 10th Assembly in Melbourne be referred to the Councils of the Church for concurrence (BoU para15 (e) and Constitution clause 39.) Despite this, the ASC were not persuaded to recall the Assembly to do so.

So The Reforming Alliance is committed to being an ongoing voice for these concerns, and will fulfil this goal by survey, public statement, meetings, by debate and the provision of resources.

In all these activities we are committed to speaking in the Spirit of Christ. Membership of the Alliance will be open to individual people and to any council of the UCA which finds itself in agreement with the aims and purposes of the Alliance, and the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia.

As we pursue this, we understand that it is only God who can bring about this reform. Our role is to seek and follow God's leading in obedience and grace. These are exciting times. May you know the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit as you go about your ministries in the coming days.