

UCA Where are you? No 6

This is part of a series of papers that reflect on the course of the Uniting Church. Tracing the personal journey and reflections of Rev Ted Curnow they bring together a wide range of statements and insights related to the position of the church and Christian marriage. Cultural context, lead up stages, Assembly 2018, the aftermath and sorting out substance and myth.

The Moment Arrives.

Sacred season of Prayer and Fasting

It would be wrong to suggest that the process before the Church was little more than slick political manoeuvring. A **sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting** before the Assembly meeting, (over 40 days before and during the National Assembly June 5 – July 14) was arranged in partnership with the **Uniting Prayer and Fasting** programme. Rev Ann Hibbard's appeal for the Lord to raise up the ACC to be a people of prayer and fasting at this critical time was nothing less than impressive. Via the on-line medium of 'Zoom,' connecting with the 'Prayer Muster' web-page Anne Hibbard encouraged intercessors across the nation. People were also encouraged to subscribe to a 20 day Daily Devotional written by ACC members and built around paragraphs of the Basis of Union. Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki, National chair and spokesperson for the ACC in placement at Mooloolaba, Sunshine Coast Queensland opened on Day 1, pointing to Paragraph 1 while I made a contribution on Day 3 by reflecting on Para.3a.

Day 1, Paragraph 1. Hedley clearly outlined the situation facing the Church.

“As the Uniting Church seeks to move forward together in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, in the light of the radical proposal by the Assembly Standing Committee to redefine marriage in July, we are reminded of our historical and ecumenical commitment to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ. That is, the UCA cannot go off on a tangent apart from its commitment to live and work within the faith and unity of the Only Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. To do so will be a departure from our Basis of Union and our Constitution. The aim of Assembly, therefore, is NOT to try to maintain a ‘diversity of views, on this matter as if ‘diversity’ of theologies is in itself the highest good and goal of the church, but to help the Church to move forward together in ‘sole loyalty to Christ’.

*Contrary to the significant flaw in the A.S.C. report, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations ‘declares’ that **Marriage enters into the substance of the faith** and therefore is not a matter that allows for a diversity of opinion.*

The issue before us is not human sexuality as such, but the authority of Scripture. When we speak of the authority of Scripture (BoU para.5) we are speaking about the Lordship of Christ as the ‘Living Head of the Church.’ and the Lordship of Christ is the essence of the gospel itself. To deny this reality, is to promote a totally different gospel to the one outlined in the UCA’s Basis of Union.’

On day three I was invited to contribute to the reflection.

Day 3, Paragraph 3A The Basis of Union: Built on one Lord Jesus Christ.

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ. The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. In love for the world, God gave his Son to take away the world's sin.. **Colossians 1:15-23** Verse 20—through him (Jesus) God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Reflection:

Looking at the Uniting Church logo Jesus Christ stands central in the symbol of the cross as its vertical and horizontal arms span the circle of the world. Amid our sensitivities of the 21st century the cross represents a primitive, barbaric tool of execution, indeed a devastating, negative defeat, while in contrast the resurrection seems to hold out an unreal hope, a demonstration of a glorious victory.

The power of the cross is found in **who** was executed; in the deity of Christ, as spelt out and embedded in the Nicene Creed. Often people have said that because Jesus rose again he must be God. Peter turned this around and affirmed the New Testament faith when in Acts chapter 2 he declared God raised him (Jesus) up because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.(Acts 2:24) Later Paul wrote, “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.*” (Col..2:9,15)

Jesus decisive death and resurrection involves each of us and is central to Christian belief and the Uniting Church. This is why Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 3; 10-15 of Jesus as the foundation and of people building on that foundation as a labour that is not in vain. Today as never before we need to know we are not constructing the kingdom of God by our own efforts or oiling the wheels of a machine that is soon going over a cliff.

The early Christians were joyful because they knew themselves to be living in the first, opening days of God's new creation. Selwyn Hughes put it well. “Because of what Christ did-- no Christian need ever be intimidated by death. It is death that has failed not he.” Some suggest Christ's resurrection is a spiritual truth that calls us to discover God in our own spirituality, but if it was only ‘spiritual’ then the material world is left without redemption.

Jesus death and resurrection was not a mere ideal or example to follow, it was nothing less than the climatic event of cosmic history that will result in the creation itself being set free from its slavery to corruption, fear and death. N.T. Wright has said some of the most moving words he ever sings are those in the old Christmas carol, “Once in Royal David's city,---and our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love.” In a hope-less world we have a real reason to worship and celebrate Jesus.

Prayer

Risen Lord, stand in the midst of your church and when we are distracted or overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues of the day help us to catch a glimpse of the significance of your victory so that we live in it and in the holy optimism of the gospel.

Thursday 5 July ACC Pastoral letter

Rev Hedley Fihaki the chairman of the National Council wrote drawing attention to the **Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting** and particularly seeking prayers for courage and wisdom for delegates that they would speak boldly in humility and with grace.

The ACC had been encouraged by the personal response of the Rev. Emeritus Prof. James Haire to the Assembly Standing Committee and Doctrine Working Group. Prof. Haire had laid out clearly the central issues of concern for many people within the church but had suffered an unjust personal attack. Hedley Fihaki appealed to leaders of the Assembly for genuine respectful conversations around the specific issues raised.

Rev Ann Hibbard continued to coordinate prayer times during the Assembly. Thursday evening was free, so an informal gathering was planned at St Paul's Lutheran Box Hill.

Rev Lulu Senituli and Hedley would present the ACC proposal No 31 to the Assembly on Monday 9 July.

Friday 6 July Statement to UCA Assembly.

As a technically unaligned, independent person, Mr Warren Mack had gathered a national response to the Assembly Standing Committee's proposals to change the church's received doctrine of marriage from that exclusively between a man and a woman, to that between two people regardless of gender. It was a clear protest statement intended for those in **Specified Ministries** and **Church Councils** to sign. The list of approximately 250 entries was significant in that it represented the support of many corporate types of councils. It began with the Loxton Uniting Church Council in South Australia. The list reached churches across the nation but was initiated and well supported by South Australians.

The statement read:

“If the 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church adopts these proposals in or close to their current form, humbly, and in accordance with our prayerful convictions, we state that we will not accept these decisions, and we will stand apart from them in ways that we will determine after the Assembly meets.”

Opening Worship Assembly 8 July 2018.

With my wife I travelled by train from Blackburn that evening into 120 Collins St Melbourne to St Michael's Uniting Church for the opening worship of the National Assembly. It was a chilling air that evening and on our arrival the doors of the church remained locked. As we stood on the curb waiting to enter we soon found ourselves surrounded with familiar friends from over the years including the Brown's who flew in from holidays in Queensland, to join a SA 'friends squad' supporting President to be, Deidre Palmer. Rev. Dean and Sandra Drayton also arrived from New South Wales. Again our SA roots revisited us as Rev. Matt. Curnow and waved and shouted from a passing car looking for a park. Rev. David Fotheringham from our local Frankston church (Vic) also arrived.

It was heartening to meet friends but the feeling of grief, similar to that of attending the funeral of a long-time friend was close to the surface. It seemed like the end of an era, a passing out parade, an inevitable parting of the way. It was a strange evening that held together all the features and feelings of a memorial service for a church that had lost its way.

The emerging big picture on the canvas of life had changed by now to feature dark clouds that were so intense that they were threatening to cover the landscape. However there were still flashes of colour and I knew in my heart of hearts that failure was never final. Similar to the familiar mixed feelings of a funeral, a reflective cocktail of combined fond memories and a melancholy lament were topped off with an overlay of quiet grief that in many ways seemed to mark the end of an era. It was both the end of a promising church vision and a personal standing apart from a mother church that I had related to over a lifetime.

Biblical Centrality

In many ways my early Christian nurture had been derived from evangelical sources beyond liberal Methodism. I went to Bible College with early reservations about what appeared to be a rich, but ‘watered down’ theology in the Basis of Union. In fact it appears that something of a slippery slide had begun many years before church union and that this explains what was possibly the deformed birth of the new church in 1977. Rev Robert Griffith has pointed out that one of the founding fathers of the Uniting Church Davis McCaughey had delivered a stinging rebuke to the church at the 1979 Assembly, just two years after its birth. Griffith wrote , ‘*Even at that early stage, our spiritual cataracts had begun to grow and blur our vision as we wandered away from the Basis of Union and the Scriptures in pursuit of some unique ‘ethos’ which distinguished us from other parts of the Body of Christ.*’ (Catalyst December 2018, p 30)

From my early Bible College background I had always thought the Basis of Union had depreciated the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible. For instance, in my childhood years after the reading of the psalm in worship the congregation would stand and sing the Gloria. ‘*Glory be to the Father ,and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end Amen.*’ From this affirmation of Trinity and reverence for the sacred text, the church moved to follow the select readings of the Common Lectionary. Today the church I attend uses the Narrative Lectionary based on biblical stories and analogies because people today prefer stories,--- it suits our cultural context. It appears that in an attempt to be relevant, since the Assembly decision of 2003, that provided for homosexual practise, the church has positioned itself into a corner. Instead of being guided by the sacred text the church has come to believe that the only compassionate response to sexual attraction and the liberation of the 1960s is to comply with social trends and to move towards changing the received Christian understanding of marriage.

Irony of the Event.

The notice board in front of St Michael’s told its own story. The wording read,-- “*A Church for thinking people.*” There was an inbuilt irony attached to our welcome at St Michael’s that night. It had been the church of Rev. Dr Francis Macnab who has academically concluded that traditional Christian beliefs had run their course. He had directed the Cairn-Millar Institute and like the Gnostic sect in the times of the early church he had given himself to promoting a ‘new faith’ built on his own special acquired knowledge and psychotherapy. We had been left in the cold earlier that evening until someone climbed the stairs and thumped on the bolted doors.

I found myself thinking was the proposal before this Assembly based on a similar academic ‘pride of life’ principle for *thinking people*, that distorted the truth? Rather than being a gateway to life and an exciting, new inclusive, contemporary faith, was it what the writer of 1 John 2:15-17 describes as a ‘love of the world’? Was it like the heresy of Gnosticism in the early church, a heresy that, like the bolted church door, in fact prevented people from entering the warmth and life of the kingdom of God?

We were handed an attractive printed order of service with flowing colours announcing , “**Abundant Grace, Liberating Hope**”. A smiling Deidre Palmer graced the back cover. The theme was festive, positive and refreshing. It would have resonated with many for all sorts of different political-socio, and theological reasons. The theme of the Assembly was certainly catchy but it would only be significant if it had roots!!! It was an impressive logo with a splash of colour but in considering the bigger picture I couldn’t help but think that the gloss colour had faded and an underlying stain now distracted from its beauty. I feared the church had sadly bypassed and even become detached from the vitality and life embedded in its reformed, evangelical, revivalist roots.

The words of the theme spoke into the experience of the three years that my wife Beryl and myself had known under the sound biblical teaching ministry of Rev Geoffrey Bingham, an ex Sydney Anglican and missionary. Bingham had released us from a stuffy institutional religion and introduced us to a living, life giving Word.

Like the church in Galatia that had been in danger of being deceived, our generation had largely been fed on a diet of moralising and churchiandy. Many of our peers had left the church. While following rules or religious institutionalism had never fitted my more spontaneous personality type, teaching about the deep significance of the cross and how Christ had fulfilled the demands of a deadly legalism had led to an experience of liberating grace.

Throughout church history there have also been those who have argued that grace is free so that disciplined living had been given less priority. The danger here of course is to give emphasis to grace to the point that **liberty becomes a licence**. Grace at the expense of self-control however only weakens character. During unsteady times of testing however I think I have come to learn that grace can lead to a discipline that need not be repressive. The advantage is that self-discipline brings greater effectiveness. Selwyn Hughes in his devotional says, *“To be disciplined means that the forces that flow through your personality are all harnessed in the right direction.”* (February 11, 2000) This seems to align with 2 Timothy 1:7 that speaks of the *spirit of power, love and self-control*. Instead of going with the flow, the cultural trend, we need to know that we can take control, live and celebrate in **Abundant Grace and Liberating Hope**.

Opening Worship

The 27 page Order of Service began with a Festive ALLELUIA sung by a South Australian choir, a welcome by Rev Stuart McMillan and a Welcome to Country. A breathless late arrival from the airport squeezed in alongside of us with her baggage as a group from SA made their contribution during the installation of the new President. Deidre Palmer.

After the installation and presentation of symbols, Deidre took up the theme ‘Abundant Grace, Liberating Hope’. Delegates to the 15th Assembly stood and made their commitment to being a Christian community.

**“As members of the Fifteenth assembly,
we commit ourselves throughout this meeting
to seek to be obedient to Christ our Head:
to actively wait upon God’s Word,
to prayerfully discern God’s will,
and to humbly recognise the limits of our authority.**

**Having been called and addressed,
we commit ourselves through our time together
to seek to model behaviour that embodies Christ’s love
and values each person as made in God’s image;
that encourages respectful conversation,
debate and theological reflection, and which provides a safe place for everyone
as we journey together in faithfulness to Christ.”**

The new President presented well and after shaking her hand and a brief recall of where our paths had crossed in the past we found ourselves on the return train to Blackburn with Rev John Cramner, also an acquaintance from early S.A. Bible College days. Indeed, it seemed we had travelled the full circle that evening but the church we had once known and served had changed. It was more than an older generation struggling with the passing of years, it was a change that penetrated the heart of the very gospel itself.

This 2018 Assembly would be a historic occasion. The preparation towards the vote that redefined Christian marriage had been extensive and well orchestrated over many years. The “Space for Grace” discussions and appeals for ‘respectful listening’ and ‘safe-places’ had all been well executed. Following the national plebiscite and a wave of public acceptance, to some it now seemed an expedient strategy to test the Assembly. The 269 members of the Assembly were presented with a lengthy and detailed report a few weeks before deciding on the future direction of the church.

As has been mentioned, over the months leading up to the national gathering a new disturbing attitude, an aggressive tone towards those holding an orthodox, position had become more obvious. Instead of advocating reconciliation and unity I had noted several occasions that endorsed the exact opposite. Alongside of words advocating space and mutual respect there was a new militancy in the air. People genuinely concerned about the direction of the church in some places had been encouraged to leave with the knowledge that their church property could be sold to assist the mission of the Uniting church. In an alarming way we had personally experienced something of this rejection. Although people appreciated our friendship, even solid life-long Christian friends, some with traditional church connections made it clear that it would actually be more helpful for us and those disagreeing with the all-inclusive Assembly proposal to actually leave the Uniting Church

The Methodist Aldersgate Fellowship for Revival, EMU, (Evangelical Members in the Uniting Church) and various groups had long been calling for reform within the church but now it seemed to have run its course by reaching a clear confrontation crisis and climax. I arranged a public prayer time in the local church but local members were just not used of prayer time gatherings. With just one other attender joining in over three weeks, praying about the future direction of the national church was obviously something less than an important priority for many. The majority were either uninformed or just not interested.

The spiritual barometer of the church generally just seemed to have hit rock bottom.

Generational Tactics

In many ways it was a *‘generational Assembly’* that appealed and encouraged those of the younger generation to claim the day. With a youth orientation gathering before the Assembly and a youth follow-up event following the Assembly it was not a delegate’s wealth of knowledge or experience of life, as much as their willingness to vote that counted. A children’s worker and youth worker were recruited as delegates from our Congregation. **With others, they would decide on the behalf of thousands across the nation if marriage was of core significance to the Christian faith.** To me it seemed like the stokers in the engine room of the Titanic being invited to captain the ship with its hundreds of passengers. Our two lively delegates would later return home and in a flush of excitement reported that **the inclusive decision about marriage was the kind of progressive decision that the Uniting Church had been created for.** I was left with the impression that rather than it being an original insight, the thought may have been adopted after some form of coaching or grooming. Indeed, I recognised the words as those of Rev Dr Andrew Dutney whose enthusiasm and council had obviously made their impact on the targeted younger generation.

Down to business Monday 9 July

From Monday 9 July the Assembly’s 265 members drawn from across the Councils of the church would decide on the church’s national priorities for the next three years. They would consider reports and proposals on an amazing range of issues. These included the church’s response to the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse, to the challenge of domestic violence and the continuing conversation on Indigenous sovereignty in light of the covenant relationship between the church and the Aboriginal Congress. Church agencies would also

report and display information. Climate change and voluntary assisted dying along with the proposal about marriage and same-sex relationships would all be considered.

However with filtered news of closed sessions during the Assembly, reports of a tight control and limited transparency, threats of rejection if visitors spoke to the media, for those depending on second hand reports, the tone of the Assembly meetings was left somewhat clouded.

Monday 9 July ACC Proposal Presented

That the Assembly resolve: *To affirm the 1997 Assembly definition of marriage, as in Assembly Minute 97.31.12*

In part that Minute reads:

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service:

- the woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with god, in the company of family and friends.
- the couple affirm their trust in each other and in God.
- the church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together. In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.

Rationale:

To adopt this proposal and affirm the definition of marriage included in the Assembly Minute 97.31.12 (i) ie to reject the Assembly Standing Committee proposals to change the Uniting Church in Australia's definition of marriage as in proposal 08 'Marriage and Same-gender relationships' part (b), (c) ii and (d)1. In light of the following very significant opinion by the Rev Emeritus Professor James Haire AC KSJ MA PhD DD DLitt D.Univ, 9th President of the UCA and 4th President of the National Council of Churches, we believe it is appropriate and necessary for the Assembly to adopt this proposal.

The proposals presented by the Assembly Standing Committee(ASC), based on the work of the Doctrine Working Group(DVG), are, as the final words of the attached report says, 'ready to be tested by the Assembly' (5.7) in July 2018. The Fifteenth Assembly in 2018 is to test them. That is the Assembly's task.

The following points question whether as a church the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) is in fact empowered or able to accept these proposals, in particular proposal (b), proposal (c) (iii) and proposal (d).1. This response is of the view that, whatever the individual or corporate views of the members of this Assembly are, the UCA Assembly needs to state in humility that it is not empowered nor able to accept these proposals, particularly (b), (c)(ii) and (d).1.

Firstly, this is so because of the UCA's foundational documents, Paragraph 2 of the UCA's Constitution states that the '*Church.. lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, guided by its Basis of Union.*' In relation to this issue, two matters flow from that sentence. First, the UCA is not to set out to live in a way that would of

itself further fracture the unity of the church catholic. Proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d)1 would do this if not carried out in concurrence with other parts of the church catholic, particularly in Australia.

Second, the UCA is to be 'guided' by its Basis of Union. Whatever 'guided' may mean, the word certainly means that the UCA is not to go against the words in the paragraphs of its Basis of Union. That Basis of Union states in Paragraph 5 (The Biblical Witnesses) that: *'The Uniting Church acknowledges that the church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated'* (1992). Indeed Paragraph ii (Scholarly Interpreters) points to the value of contemporary scholarship in many fields. However, the UCA is in humility bound by Scripture. It is difficult to see how proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d)1 can unequivocally be supported by the witnesses of the books of the Old and New Testaments.

(1) First, then, attention needs to be given to the ecumenical question. The final sentence of Paragraph 2 of the Basis of Union (of the Whole Church) states: *'The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other churches'* (1992). The report makes no mention of any discussion with any other Church or Churches in Australia regarding proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d) 1. It merely, and very briefly, mentions discussions with other Churches regarding whether clergy and other church marriage celebrants should or should not continue to act also as agents for the State in marriage services (3.4 4). However proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d)1 are likely to cause further fracturing of relations between the UCA and other Churches in Australia, and certainly are likely to go against any moves to seek *'union with other Churches.'* If, as seems clear in this report, the methodology of the DWG and the ASC is largely a matter of theological discourse with contemporary society, and not intentionally with other Churches in Australia, then a unique charism of the UCA (to seek the reunion of the Churches) has been abandoned in favour of the UCA acting in a specific denominational way.

Moreover, Paragraph 2 also states: .. *'the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific'* (1992) Although in the report there are accounts of marriage, including Christian marriage in Tongan, Sri Lankan Tamil, Chinese and Koran cultures by individual experts in these areas, there is no discussion of the official views on this issue of any of the UCA's Asia and Pacific partner Churches, nor is there any discussion of the official resolutions of any of CALD congregations' national conferences in Australia. It is highly likely that proposals (b) (c) (ii) and (d) 1 will fracture relations with the UCA's partner Churches in Asia and the Pacific, or at least leave them in a position where they may continue to receive support from the UCA but largely cease to be theological partners with the UCA. So proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d) 1. would militate against the UCA's commitment to this part of Paragraph 2.

(2) Second, Attention needs to be given to the biblical questions. A considerable amount of the report is taken up with the issues of biblical interpretation and context. Whatever may be said, it needs to be acknowledged that the biblical witnesses, both in the Old and New Testaments, assume marriage to be between male and female. Moreover, the biblical witnesses, both in the Old and New Testaments, do not present positive endorsements of same-gender relationships. In both Testaments there clearly appears to be a strong counter-cultural element in this stance against same-gender relationships. In particular, this appears to be so in the life of the early church. Therefore, the only way in which it is possible to reinterpret the biblical material in support of same-gender marriage is to find a prism through which the material in the Old and New Testaments can be seen in a new light. The report appears to seek to do this, particularly through the use of the categories of 'love', 'grace', 'justice' and 'inclusion'.

This is not a new methodology. These themes have an important place in the church's history. However, this methodology has a number of difficulties. **First**, the search for the 'genuine

Jesus' and 'the genuine teachings of Jesus' needs to be carried out with great care, as there is always the danger of projecting one's own culture onto Jesus and his teaching. **Second**, it is dangerous always to use the Old Testament as a foil against which Jesus teaching is to be understood. Sometimes the Old Testament is not a foil at all for the New Testament, as Jesus does indeed fulfil the account or message in the Old Testament. **Third**, it is very clear that there is a strong element of counter-cultural understanding, both in the two Testaments and particularly in the life of the early church, persecuted and suffering as it was. Thus it seems that the biblical arguments of the report are not proven. Thus here proposals (b), (c)(ii) and (d) are on weak ground.

(3) Third, attention needs to be paid to theological matters. Here a major theme in the report is that of diversity, related as it is to the Trinity in the report. The difficulty here is that the distinctions within the Godhead are somehow associated with the contemporary category of 'diversity.' The language surrounding 'diversity,' especially human diversity, is not necessarily a helpful way to approach understanding of the Trinity, in that the church's language regarding the Trinity speaks primarily about three distinct Persons in the Godhead. They are not diverse; they are distinct. Thus this line of thought in relationship to Trinitarian understanding is largely irrelevant. Again, here proposals (b), (c)9 ii) and (d) are not on firm ground.

It thus seems that there is no overwhelming ecumenical, biblical or theological case in support of proposals (b), (c), 9 ii) and (d)1. If indeed proposals (b), 9c (ii) and (d)1 were to be accepted by the Assembly, it would certainly be appropriate to invoke Paragraph 39 of the Constitution, because the length of the report and the six years required to produce it of themselves suggests that **this is an issue 'vital to the life of the Church.** Nevertheless, as seen in the points above, in this matter of same-gender marriage the UCA through its Assembly seems not to be empowered nor able to institute same-gender marriage '*within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church*' (Constitution, Paragraph 2)

This series will be continued with paper Number 7. View this site or tedcurnow.wordpress.com

*Further Reference: On the above web sites, **The Story of Colliding Worlds.** The Church is caught in a remarkable period of rapid cultural change. Many Christians grieved over the loss of the past. Other are passionate about moving ahead. This resources explains two very different world-views and ways of thinking, the colliding of two worlds. It calls the church to face change, to faithfully discern the truth and with courage to be loyal in following Christ.*