



Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc

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8th June, 2012

Rev. Terence Corkin
General Secretary
National Assembly
Uniting Church in Australia
PO Box A2266
Sydney South, NSW 1235

By email and Express Post

Dear Terence,

**Re: Submission by Uniting Justice to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality
Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012**

I write on behalf of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia to complain about the submission made in April this year by Uniting Justice to the Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012. It raises some extremely serious issues about the governance of the Uniting Church and the strategy being used in the lead up to the Thirteenth Assembly, at which 'Marriage Equality', and related matters, will be a major item on the agenda.

The most urgent question concerns the authorisation of the submission. As there is no mention of it in the Minutes of the Assembly Standing Committee, which met on 16-18 March, 2012, it is reasonable to assume that you, as General Secretary, approved it on your own authority or in consultation with the President and/or the President-Elect and/or others in the Assembly Secretariat. If so, on what grounds was this done? Uniting Justice is not authorised to represent the Uniting Church in the public arena on matters that have not been adopted by the Assembly or approved by the Assembly Standing Committee. It has no authority to speak publicly on a matter of doctrine that has not even been debated in the councils of the Uniting Church.

The submission is also biased. While stating that the Uniting Church prides itself on being a diverse church, it privileges one form of diversity – that favoured by proponents and supporters of same-sex 'marriage'. No attempt is made to articulate the theological and Scriptural basis for affirming that marriage is the life-long union between a man and a woman or to give credence to those who believe that it should be upheld.

Therefore, while giving the impression that the submission had the imprimatur of the Uniting Church, it effectively debunks the official position of the Church on marriage. Uniting Justice clearly believes that the current statement contradicts principles of social justice, equality, inclusion and non-discrimination – and should be changed. That this is one of the aims of the paper is evident in the clever, but disingenuous, device of claiming to be concerned only for civil, not church, law. As its critique is based on, albeit inadequate, concepts of human dignity and the image of God drawn from Uniting Church statements, Uniting Justice's submission makes it clear that the current Uniting Church definition of marriage is discriminatory. Assurances that there is no desire to change church doctrine cannot, therefore, be believed.

The misuse of the *Basis of Union* to justify opposition to the current doctrine of marriage is disturbing. Having acknowledged that the 1997 Assembly affirmed that marriage is between a man and a woman, the submission then relativizes this understanding in the light of ‘the right to equality’. This radical shift is justified on the basis that the *Basis of Union* commits the Uniting Church to ‘remain open to constant reform’ under Christ ‘as the living Head of the Church’. However, contrary to the assumption that ‘reform’ means being ‘open-ended’ to accept contemporary beliefs and practices, the *Basis of Union* links ‘openness’ to the truth embodied in Christ and attested in the unity of Scripture. Therefore, what it means to be ‘open’ to the Word of God may be very different from what it means to be ‘open’ to evolving ideas and life-choices.

The use of concepts such as social justice, human rights, inclusion and discrimination are theologically flawed. In Scripture, justice and rights must accord with what God reveals to be righteous. The inclusion of the lost, the outcast and the stranger is not at the expense of excluding what is amiss, and the faithful are called to discriminate between good and evil without abandoning those who do wrong.

The concept of diversity is also used in a way that is inconsistent with Reformed theology. Acknowledging differences on this matter in the Uniting Church, the submission promotes the kind of diversity that departs from the clear biblical understanding of marriage. At the very least, one would have expected that a submission to the Federal Parliament would have set out the theological grounds on both sides of the argument in the Uniting Church. The fact that this was not done, and that the ‘pain’ of only one group was recognised, confirms the impression that Uniting Justice, and any key national leaders who authorised the submission, are not genuinely interested in diversity or in upholding the Church’s approved teaching and practice on the matter. The conclusion is inescapable. In both the civil and ecclesiastical arenas, ‘Marriage Equality’ is the only form of diversity permitted by Uniting Justice and its influential supporters in the Uniting Church.

It is astonishing that the submission does not address the question of the State’s interest in enacting laws about sexual relationships. It affirms the right for individuals to have their committed (but not necessarily life-long) love recognised in law, but ignores the importance of family life and the raising of children for a civil society. In this regard, it is disturbing that Uniting Justice, a strong supporter of human rights, fails to mention the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, including the right of children to be raised by their biological father and mother.

In view of the failure of our national leaders and/or the Assembly Standing Committee to strongly and publicly reaffirm the Uniting Church’s doctrine of marriage, without suggesting the possibility of it being changed in future, members are entitled to conclude that they are happy to let Uniting Justice take the lead in the run-up to Assembly, thus creating a climate that is conducive to the acceptance of resolutions that either endorse same-sex ‘marriage’ or move the Uniting Church to its acceptance at a later date.

It is most disturbing that, in its submission to the Federal Parliament, Uniting Justice has been given the freedom to actively, blatantly and publicly oppose the Uniting Church’s doctrine and polity on marriage, and has done so by avoiding appropriate Assembly Standing Committee authorisation. This action makes a mockery of good governance in the Uniting Church and erodes the confidence of its members and congregations in the integrity of some leaders and agencies who claim to speak on behalf of the whole church.

It is a matter of the gravest concern that the governance of the Uniting Church does not safeguard the integrity of our doctrine, thus permitting agencies, like Uniting Justice, to conduct their activities in the public domain without properly being held to account.

Please provide a copy of this letter to the members of the Assembly Standing Committee so they are aware of the urgent need for the Uniting Church to re-examine its governance procedures to ensure the integrity of what is said, and how it is communicated, in its name.

In view of the seriousness of the issues raised by the pre-emptive and dismissive action of Uniting Justice, with the seeming blessing of some influential national leaders, I am writing to the President, the President-Elect and other people and groups in the Uniting Church who may share these concerns.

I am also informing our ecumenical partners of the Uniting Justice submission and of our deep concern that, at the Thirteenth Assembly, the Uniting Church will be under extreme pressure to take decisions that will further isolate her from the one holy catholic and apostolic church that is genuinely open to reform under Christ.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Max Champion', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Dr. Max Champion
National Chair