



The ACC Newsletter

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

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1. Bushfire update - Support for Victorian area from Rod James

Rod provided a full report which was made available by email, and a summary is included below for your interest.

I first travelled to the Victorian bushfire area on Feb 9th, two days after the Black Saturday fires. Over the three months since the fires I have visited about 40 households in the Strathewen fire area, getting to know them, and seeking ways to encourage and assist them. It has been humbling and awesome to listen to their experiences, and to realise that it will take a long time to make personal and material recovery. The Strathewen community lost about 30 of its 200 residents in the fire, and some who did survive may not return. Others are determined to stay and begin again, knowing that things will not be the same again.

Prayer Support

Having a number of email networks to which I belong I was able to keep many people around Australia informed about the work. The prayer support of many people resulted in a tangible sense of being upheld, guided, and empowered in this difficult work. Thank you to all who have laboured together with us in this important way.

Financial Gifts

As well as praying, folk were keen to help in material ways. In addition to the general bushfire appeals I offered two opportunities for more localised financial gifts:

- *gifts for the Kinglake fire complex area to the Whittlesea combined churches fund,*
- *and gifts for the Strathewen area to my own Rod James Ministry Account.*

Over \$20,000 was given to Whittlesea Ministries Inc as a result of these communications. Some of this money is being distributed to fire victims in the form of vouchers for retail outlets, and some is being used to assist fire victims through centres in Whittlesea. Also as a result of my email communications about \$28,000 was given via my Ministry Account for relief work, grants, building expenses and travel related costs.

Working Parties and practical help

The third way in which people responded to my email communications was in the offering of their time to come on work parties to assist in the clean-up and recovery process. Due to the generosity and cooperation of folk in the local community we were able to set up the Arthur's Creek UC building as a campsite for the work parties. The Naracoorte UC purchased a portable shower and made it available for the duration of the work.

Other necessities such as a fridge, microwave and cooking plates have also been made available. Russell Flavel and Frank Milne from the Aberfoyle Park UC have acted as coordinators and leaders attending to the organisation, travel and accommodation of the work parties. By the end of May we will have had a total of 43 people spend 2-5 days camping at the Arthur's Creek church and working in the Strathewen fire area: 17 from Adelaide and Southern Hills, 2 from Port Lincoln, 5 from Loxton, 1 from Keith, 9 from Kyabram (Vic), 3 from Lockington (Vic), and 6 from St George (Qld). In addition other folk from nearby districts have come for the day and joined the teams. The Victorian Farmers Federation has provided insurance, protective accessories and fencing equipment, as well as numerous volunteers. The work parties have worked on over 20 properties, removing burnt fences, cutting up fallen timber, and building new fences. The St George UC folk acquired three caravans and brought them to Arthur's Creek, and someone in Adelaide donated a fourth van. Three of these have been given to families in the Kinglake area who lost their homes. The fourth is being used at Arthur's Creek for accommodation. I have also had the pleasure of distributing quilts, rugs and woollen beanies (hats) which have been lovingly hand-made for fire victims.

Special thanks must go to Malcolm and Margaret MacMillan who have hosted me and organised evening meals for our volunteers in nearby homes. Thank you also to those who have provided wonderful meals, hospitality and various kinds of assistance.

A Personal Note

To become involved in the above way has been, for me personally, a demanding but rewarding episode in my life. I confess to having been almost completely distracted from usual ministry responsibilities as I responded to human needs, the like of which I have not previously encountered. I apologise to those who have felt that I went AWOL from other responsibilities. I can only say, like St Paul, 'a wide door for effective work has been opened to me' (1 Corinthians 16:9).

Rod James

8th May 2009

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2. 12th Assembly – a brief report

2.1 The 12th Assembly opened with worship and preliminary business on 15th July with the new President Rev. Alistair Macrae installed at the worship service held that night. Revd Macrae has been a Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and is most well-known for being the chairperson of the Assembly Sexuality Task Group which produced the controversial report on sexuality based around the idea of 'right relationships'. This report and its recommendations were debated at the 1997 Assembly. Rev Macrae's sermon continued the Assembly theme – *Living Water Thirsty Land* and is available on the Assembly website in full: <http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/resources/speeches/58-090715openingsermon>

2.2 The covenant with the UAICC was renewed during the morning session on 16th July, setting a context for introduction of the proposed preamble and constitutional changes. Guests from overseas churches were introduced early in the meeting and there was brief sharing of issues from leaders of three churches: Methodist Church of Zimbabwe; the Presbyterian Church of India, and the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma. The out-going President (2006-2009) Rev. Gregor Henderson, presented his concluding thoughts to the Assembly on Thursday afternoon. Check the Assembly website for more comment as these reflect a significant period of influence in the life of the UCA, as he was also the Assembly General Secretary 1989-2000: <http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/>

2.3 New Preamble to the constitution

On Monday morning, in the first business session (before morning tea and after the Bible study), the proposed new preamble was passed. No substantial debate was undertaken throughout the time the matter was on the agenda. No alternative proposals were eventually able to be considered due to the process adopted.

The move toward the vote without further discussion (eventual process of formal decision making with the proposal being simply put) was confirmed late on Sunday afternoon after what was clearly a very difficult last business session. This session went into overtime with the Congress members leaving at one stage, indicating they did not believe it was a safe place – see the Assembly news for the report of some of what happened. The move from consensus to formal decision-making occurred swiftly the next morning, as it can easily, if the numbers are there. (75% is needed to move to formal-decision), and the preamble was thus approved with an overwhelming vote in favour. The preamble states in part (extract from Assembly news) that:

1. *When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.*
2. *Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.*
3. *The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.*

For full details see the Assembly website and UCA publications, but the final details were still not available at the time of the newsletter publication:

<http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/153-newpreamble>

Further changes to the constitution following on from the changed preamble context were made following the decision on the preamble.

<http://www.assembly2009.uca.org.au/media-centre/latest-news/163-constitutionchanged>

Note: These matters will now be sent to presbyteries and Synods for assent or rejection following the usual process for constitutional change.

Brief background to the proposals: Information for comment was provided as draft material to Synods in the latter part of 2008, and also in a letter to presbyteries and synod dated December 8 2008 by the Assembly General Secretary.

This reported: When considering the proposed Constitutional amendments it will be noted that they fall into two parts: the Preamble and the first sections of the Constitution. The Preamble of the current Constitution relates to a very specific part of the history of the UCA — the steps of the three churches into union. A preamble has the opportunity to locate a community to which a Constitution applies within a specific context and set of values. The working group suggests that our context as an Australian church is in the land occupied by a first peoples. It suggests that the character of our community should be shaped by that reality and our relationship with those first peoples of the land. The revised Preamble focuses us on these issues and relationships."

There was some discussion in some councils of the church and some feedback before the actual proposal was prepared and sent out to Assembly members with the second mailing of Assembly papers. That proposal was then revised a few days before the start of the actual Assembly following a further meeting between the Task Group Convenor and the Assembly General Secretary with Congress during the National Conference of the Congress in Perth in July. Check with your presbytery for its own consideration and feedback and the full preliminary material.

2.4 Proposal to include names of dissenters to the Minute record of the 2006 Assembly (re: the sexuality resolution)

ACC member Pastor Euan McDonald, was able to raise a 'preliminary business matter' concerning the non-inclusion in the minutes from 2006 of the members of the Assembly who dissented from the sexuality decisions (known then as Res.108). Euan was the member at the 2006 Assembly who moved the proposal for dissent, and he and others, have been rightly concerned as to what has happened in terms of the acknowledgement of this dissent.

Euan McDonald and Jonathan Button presented their proposal on the final morning of the Assembly asking the Assembly to:

(a) to amend the minutes of the 11th Assembly to include the decision to record the names of members who dissented from Minute 06.41; and

(b) to include the list of names of those who registered dissent as an appendix to the Minutes of the 11th Assembly.

Initially this proposal received wide support from the 12th Assembly. The Assembly General Secretary then spoke at length in opposition to the proposal and the support dissipated, and after different amendments and ideas were presented, it became clear that the original proposal would not be approved. The eventual decision of the 12th Assembly was to simply acknowledge that a list of the names of dissenters had been attached to an appendix of the minutes of the 11th Assembly.

2.5 President-elect – Revd Dr Andrew Dutney

Reverend Dr Andrew Dutney was elected President-elect by the 12th Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church (he will be installed as President in 2012). Rev. Dr Dutney is presently the Principal of the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (Adelaide) and an Associate Professor at Flinders University.

2.6 ACC Involvement and Appreciations

*Thank you to all those members who expressed support through prayer and messages. The prayer team and hospitality arrangements provided by the ACC were an integral part of helping ACC members feel supported and encouraged during the week-long meeting (15-21 July). The prayer room was open 1 pm – 10 pm each day, and private prayer and worship was also conducted early each morning. In particular, we acknowledge members **from Liverpool Uniting Church** who provided significant practical help with prayer members, hospitality and transport.*

A group of 40 people attended the ACC dinner on Sunday night and heard the ACC Chair Revd Dr Max Champion speak on the theme of the 'The new intolerance', as well as hearing reflections and comments from members and observers at the 12th Assembly.

All members have hopefully now had at least a short rest, and our prayers are with them for health, recovery and future strength, including the prayer team, led by Rev. Anne Hibbard, several of whom fasted during the 40 day season of sacred prayer. For the resources on this period see:

http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/sacred_season_of_prayer_and_fasting_40_day_liturgy.pdf

3. Crosslight – debate about the ACC logo

ACC logo and Crosslight Newspaper

The discussion about the ACC logo, which had arisen from comments in the May edition of the Victorian and Tas. UCA newspaper *Crosslight*, continued with letters to the editor in the June edition. In the July edition, (following the chair's excellent negotiation), Revd Dr Max Champion provided a significant piece which commented on the unfortunate way the logo had been referred to by the editor of *Crosslight*, and gave a full explanation of the meaning and significance of the ACC logo, as well as the ministry and mission of the ACC.

NOTE: Advertising in Synod Publications:

ACC has paid for advertisements to be placed in all the Synod publications in either August or September, particularly highlighting the September Conference and website resources.

This is at significant cost, and contributions are welcome to cover these initiatives.

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