

Help with the 2014 UCA Marriage Discussion Process and Questions

The UCA National Assembly is seeking written responses from its members on the following questions in relation to marriage and same-gender partnerships. (See the official UCA papers released in May 2014: <http://assembly.uca.org.au/marriage>). The *Discussion Paper on Marriage* prepared by the Assembly Doctrine Working Group is some 20 pages long and the ACC thought it would be helpful to provide some suggested points in answer to the questions contained on the Response Form of the separate *Study Guide* (see pages 9 and 10).

The questions and suggested points are set out below:

1. Identify any challenges or new insights raised for members of the group by the commentary on the theological dimensions of the marriage service.

- The following seems to be the key sentence in the commentary:
'If ever the Uniting Church was to re-define marriage to include same-gender partnerships, it would remain theologically impossible to bypass this deep scriptural tradition in which male-female duality and male-female union are located right near the heart of the divine purpose.' (No 13 'Scriptural language')
Because of this truth the idea of so called 'same-gender marriage' seems impossible to us as a biblical faith-community.
- Both the Uniting in Worship 2 Marriage Service and the commentary make too little of the oneness of marriage and family—father, mother and children. Marriage fortifies a natural given—the love-union of male and female resulting in children. If a church departs from the foundational understanding of a mother and father where will this lead? Departing from this natural given will inevitably result in marriage becoming anything, everything and nothing.

2. If the government were to legislate to enable same-gender couples to marry, what issues or questions would this raise for you?

- The main reason for the state legislating about relationships at all is for the protection of children. Self-evident public wisdom has always recognised that the best environment for a child to grow up in is in a household with their mother and father, whose mutual love and long-term covenant union is the foundation of the child's familial identity and security. The marriage law has stood to recognise and protect that identity and security.
- Because the right to marry and the right to have children are recognised internationally as a compound right, legislating for same gender couples to marry is also legislating to normalise single gender parenting. Unlike other single parenting which is often the result of difficult or tragic circumstances, this innovation would legislate to deny the right of each child to have a mother and a father.
- In overseas countries where same-gender marriage has been introduced, corresponding school curriculums have been changed to emphasise the claimed goodness and normality of same-gender relationships, sexual activity and parenting. At the same time statements to the contrary are deemed antisocial or even unlawful.

3. What would you see as appropriate responses by the Uniting Church?

- pastorally for its members and the wider community?

- The Uniting Church should continually draw people's attention to the words of the Lord Jesus who referenced Scripture when he said

'from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Mark 10:6-9 (ESV)

- in the church's practices concerning Christian marriage?

- The Uniting Church should reaffirm its current biblical doctrine of marriage, holding fast to the true nature, purpose and splendour of traditional marriage and family. It should therefore instruct its members and interested others in the beauty, sanctity, function and importance of Christian marriage. And it should continue to solemnise such marriages in the name of God, blessing those whom God has joined together.

- in relation to the government and the church's role in conducting marriages?

- If the government were to legislate to enable same-gender couples to marry, that would change entirely what marriage is according to that law. It would no longer be the clear recognition of a natural given—the love-union of a man and woman resulting in children, and would, instead, simply be a covenant bond between any two persons. This is not what the Christian church has been solemnising and blessing in the past, and most Christian churches and their ministers would struggle with being the authorised celebrants of such covenants and with declaring them to be marriages contrary to Scripture. Some churches may choose to take no part in this legal registration of relationships. They may simply solemnise and bless man/woman marriages before and in the name of God and leave legal registration to others.

- in any celebration or blessing of same-gender relationships?

- The blessing of the man and the woman (*Genesis 1:27, 28*) is related to their male-female creation in the image of God, and to the commission to 'be fruitful and multiply'. The idea of God ordaining and blessing sexual relations between two men or two women defies Scripture and all that we believe about God. The homosexual lobby in the Uniting Church has made it clear that 'any celebration or blessing of same-gender relationships' falls short of their objective of so called 'gay marriage'. Future National Assemblies would still face their ongoing demands.

4. Should the Uniting Church reconsider its understanding of marriage at this time? Why or why not?

- It is Jesus Christ who defines Christian marriage. If the Uniting Church were to depart from his definition it would separate itself from Christ and, sadly, consign itself to the dustbin of church history. If the Uniting Church decided to depart from this biblical doctrine many of its congregations would almost certainly hold fast to Christ and distance themselves from the Uniting Church.

5. What other issues are important to you in relation to these matters?

- Participants in this discussion process have been told to 'trust ambiguity. We are not here to debate who is right or wrong.' As important as it is to listen to others and test our own beliefs, the ultimate purpose of Christian conversation is to 'respect' God's Word as it has been embodied in Jesus Christ, attested in Scripture and disclosed by the Holy Spirit

6. Are there particular questions or insights into these issues that you want to share from your ethno-cultural community?

- As far as migrant communities are concerned it is Christ who defines Marriage not the Uniting Church. One of the difficult issues raised for our communities is the idea that our UCA wants to know "our opinion" and "cultural experiences" of Marriage. The premise of these questions comes from a predominantly western (progressive) framework that fails to take seriously our deeply biblical understanding of Marriage as instituted by Christ and reflective of his relationship to His church.