

President's Report

Give Spiritual leadership and encouragement

Statements on the Voice to Parliament and the Uluru Statement from the Heart

I have made several statements on the Voice to Parliament, some of them with Mark Kickett, Interim Chair of the UAICC. These include a video in the Day of Mourning resource, the joint video with Mark for Survival Day, a joint letter to members of parliament by other religious leaders, and a statement welcoming the launch of the Yes campaign (again with Mark). In making these statements with a clear commitment to voting Yes and encouraging others to do the same I have been guided by the following:

- Ongoing conversations with Mark Kickett, Interim Chair of UAICC and the UAICC executive. Mark and I agreed to the Survival Day video text and the statement welcoming the Yes campaign launch.
- This UAICC Executive resolution Statement from the Heart (2017). In August 2017, responding to the Statement from the Heart, the National Executive of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) affirmed the work that supports the Statement from the Heart, in which First Nations leaders asked for a voice to advise Parliament, and the creation of a commission to oversee Makarrata or treaty making. Subsequent to this, the UAICC National Conference resolved to invite the Assembly to “support work to progress the Uluru statement (sic)” and “endorse and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including principles of self-determination”.
- Other First Nations Christians and their support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including the Voice.
- First Nations people, both those supporting the Voice and those opposed.
- Assembly Resolution **18.09 Recognition of First Peoples as Sovereign**

In the light of:

- *the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church which defines sovereignty to be the way in which First Peoples understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians,*
- *the Statement from the Heart's acknowledgment that sovereignty is a spiritual notion, reflecting the ancestral tie between the land and First Peoples, and*
- *to affirm that the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in this land.*
- A Heart for First Peoples from the *Vision for A Just Australia*, the key Assembly Statement on justice and social issues. The first three hopes from that document are:
 - *A constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to the Federal Government.*
 - *A Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of: » Agreement-making or treaty-making between governments and First Peoples » Truth-telling about Australia's history, seeking justice, healing, and reconciliation.*
 - *Self-determination that gives First Peoples full control over decisions impacting their lives and communities*

<https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/A-First-Peoples-Heart.pdf>

- The Statement to the Nation (1977 & 1988), The Covenant, including the renewing of the Covenant and The Preamble.
- The World Council of Churches recent [Statement on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](#)
- The leadership of our predecessor churches in the 1967 referendum.

I am aware that some members of the Uniting Church do not agree with the Assembly making such clear statements and view them as political. I view this as a theological and moral action, guided by over 50 years of theological reflection, Assembly statements and social justice. As well as working with Mark Kickett I have also consulted with UnitingCare National, including Sam Gledhill, their Senior Advisor-First Peoples, and Alison Overeem the chair of their First Peoples Network

Catholic Plenary and Synod

I was part of an ecumenical group that offered reflections ahead of the Continental Synod that is part of the Catholic Church's exploration of becoming a more synodal church. Pope Francis has invited Christians around the globe to pray for the Catholic Synod on Saturday 30 September 2023. I will be writing to all congregations and agencies inviting them to pray for the Catholic Synod and to contact their local Catholic parish or agency to assure them of their prayers for the Catholic Synod. This is a way to follow up Assembly resolution 18.54 which encourages Uniting Church congregations to contact their local Catholic parish ahead of the Australian Plenary Council. The NCCA is also hoping to organise ecumenical prayer vigils which I will also be encouraging Uniting Church members to attend.

Visits to Macquarie Darling Presbytery and Presbytery of the Downs

I was delighted to able to visit the Macquarie Darling Presbytery in November and the Presbytery of the Downs in February. Each has wonderful stories of congregations engaging with their local communities to witness to the gospel, engage in acts of justice and compassion and meet human need. Each has also had to deal with natural disasters which caused trauma and hardship in their local communities.

Represent the Church

I wrote to the Hon Clare O'Neil MP, Minister for Home Affairs and The Hon Andrew Giles MP Minister for Immigration, Citizenship Migrant Services & Multicultural Affairs thanking them for their recent decision to allow 19,000 refugees on Temporary Protection Visa's to apply for permanent residency. I am grateful for the advocacy work of the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce over many years. I am including their letter as an appendix.

Overseas partners

I was pleased to represent the Uniting Church at the 200th anniversary of Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa (Methodist Church of New Zealand). I learnt much particularly by the way they regularly included Māori in their liturgy and business and their desire to shape and order their lives to be faithful to the Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

I have sent greetings to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan and the Gereja Masehi Injili di Halmahera (GMIH) for their General Assemblies. I have sent letters of prayerful support to the Te Hahi Weteriana O Aotearoa and the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand following Cyclone Gabrielle.

Such other things as may be requested or advised by the Assembly

West Papua and Indonesia

As per the resolution at the November 2022 ASC to:

Request the President, in consultation with Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, to work with UnitingWorld, Church Partners in West Papua and the Pacific Conference of Churches regarding possible advocacy to the Australian Government for West Papua

Sureka Goringe, Apwee Ting and I met with the Indonesian Ambassador and the Indonesian Minister of Law and Human Rights. We discussed a recent report published by the World Council of Churches (WCC) that attempted to document how many Internally Displaced Persons there were in West Papua and Papua New Guinea. The Ambassador gave an undertaking to follow up the WCC report. Uniting World will follow up with the Ambassador.

In consultation with Sureka Goringe and Apwee Ting we have determined that now is not the best time to lobby the Australian government. We will review this on a regular basis.

Other

Letter from Dr. Fihaki.

I understand many of you received an email with attachment from Dr. Fihaki. This letter consisted primarily of a recirculation of a previous statement by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. As best as I have been able to ascertain this is not official letter from the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

After discussion with the Moderators, I do not believe any further action is required by the Assembly. The main request is around the use of property which is a Synod matter.

I am sorry for the distress this letter caused to some of you.

President's Conference

I have begun planning for the President's Conference which will be held on July 26-30, 2023. July 26-28 will be for ministry agents with a theme *Ministry in Precarious times* and July 29-30 will be for anyone in the Uniting Church with the theme #Allof This is Us with a focus on the Covenant, growing and developing healthy communities of faith, and the work of the Assembly.

Leave and study leave

I had four weeks leave over December and January. I also took one week of study leave to do some reading. I finished three books *Love's Mysteries: The body, self, precariousness and God* by Rachel Mann, *Everything You Need to Know About the Uluru Statement from the Heart* by Megan Davis and George Williams, and *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters* by Louise Lawrence.

Sharon Hollis

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01/03/2023



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA ASSEMBLY
UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS**



MEDIA RELEASE – 24 February 2023

Uniting for the Voice

The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) welcome the launch of the campaign to vote Yes in the Referendum which seeks the support of the Australian people for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice.

Together Uniting Church President Rev Sharon Hollis and UAICC Interim National Chair Rev Mark Kickett affirmed their strong support for a Voice to Parliament as a critical step toward honouring the sovereignty of First Nations Australians in this land and furthering the work of truth-telling and treaty.

“This is an historic opportunity for Australia to acknowledge and honour First Nations people and their deep spiritual ties to this land and to walk together as a nation toward a better future,” said Rev Hollis.

“We support the Yes vote for the Voice as a pivotal step toward the full implementation of the Uluru Statement, so that as a nation we can finally confront the truth of our past and present and make way for justice.”

Rev Kickett said now was the time for Australians to unite in support of justice for First Peoples.

“The Uluru Statement is an invitation given by First Nations people to the people of Australia,” said Rev Kickett. “A constitutionally enshrined Voice will shape and guide the relationship between First and Second peoples in this country by enabling our people to have a say in the decisions that impact our communities.”

“In the same way the 1967 Referendum brought Australians together, this is an opportunity for all of us to unite in a big way as we seek to restore justice and promote healing for First Nations people in this land,” said Rev Kickett.

Rev Hollis said the Voice to Parliament was a moral and theological issue, not a political one.

“In the Uniting Church we believe we share a common destiny with our UAICC siblings, and First Nations people. This is an opportunity for us to honour that commitment.”

“As Second Peoples and as Christians in this land, we are called to confront the oppression, dispossession and racism faced by First Nations people.”

Rev Kickett said the Covenant in the Uniting Church tied First and Second Peoples together in a binding way so that together we may contribute to a more just Church and nation.

“Now is the time for us to hear the call of God to seek justice by doing what is right for our nation,” said Rev Kickett.

“Like Jesus, we are called to be bearers of justice, not just in our words, but in our actions and by changing systems which continue to deny the place and rights of the first Australians.”



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA ASSEMBLY
UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS**



MEDIA RELEASE – 24 February 2023

As the campaign begins, Rev Hollis and Rev Kickett encourage Uniting Church people and communities to inform themselves about the Uluru Statement and what it asks of our nation and to create respectful spaces for yarning about the impact a First Nations Voice will make.

Find resources to begin that conversation here:

<https://yes23.com.au/>

<https://ulurustatement.org/>

<https://www.ncca.org.au/about-first-nations/resources/item/2991-a-voice-to-parliament>

MEDIA CONTACT: Rebecca Beisler 0450790218

Open letter to federal parliamentarians
on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice referendum

Wednesday 22 February 2023

As leaders of Australia's major religious and ethno-religious organisations, we call on Australia's political leaders and all federal parliamentarians to support the Voice, called for by First Nations Australians through the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Unlike Canada, the United States and New Zealand, Australia has no formal bilateral arrangements in place with First Nations people, a state of affairs that is incompatible with our vision of Australia as a place of fairness for all.

We call on parliamentarians to find ways to collaborate constructively across political divides to achieve the modest constitutional recognition First Nations people seek: a constitutionally guaranteed Voice in their own affairs.

The Voice is an invitation to move towards national healing, unity and reconciliation. It seeks to formalise in our Constitution a way by which First Nations' voices and concerns can be heard, and to establish a means for overcoming the devastating effects of social exclusion. This is an opportunity to unite Australians around a proposal that seeks to make life better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Last year, we came together on the fifth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart to issue a Joint Resolution to encourage Australians to support this change:

Joint Resolution on the Uluru Statement from the Heart

On this day in 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples came together at Uluru and asked Australians to walk with them towards a better future.

Through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Indigenous Australians asked for constitutional recognition through a constitutionally guaranteed voice in their own affairs.

As leaders representing diverse religious communities, we declare our support of the Uluru Statement and its call for a First Nations Voice guaranteed by the Constitution.

We endorse this reform as necessary, right and reasonable.

Indigenous Australians must be now afforded their rightful place in the Australian Constitution. There have been many processes and much work completed. The one thing left to do is let the Australian people have their say.

We call on political leaders to take immediate bipartisan action to hold a referendum on a First Nations voice.

We draw upon our diverse traditions, beliefs and cultures to unite in support of this just cause. We respectfully ask our political representatives to do the same. We call on our fellow Australians to consider the Voice proposal on its merits, and for whatever information is needed to inform the community to be supplied promptly. Future generations of Australians will not forgive us if we fail to grasp the historical moment, and 'advance Australia' further along the path of justice.

Whatever our disagreements, let us work together to resolve them. The Voice referendum deserves cross-party co-operation. If we work together across political divides, the referendum will succeed, and we will have put Australia on both a moral and practical path to reconciliation.

Signed,



Bishop Chris McLeod
National Aboriginal Bishop
Anglican Church of Australia



Bishop Charles Gauci
Chair, Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Peoples
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference



Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohamad
Grand Mufti of Australia
Australian National Imams Council



Ven. Tenpa Bejanke
Chair
Australian Sangha Association



Ms Jillian Segal AO
President
Executive Council of Australian Jewry



Mr Prakash Mehta
President
Hindu Council of Australia



National Council of
Churches in Australia

Reverend John Gilmore
President
National Council of Churches in Australia



Sardar Ajmer Singh Gill
President
National Sikh Council of Australia



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY

Reverend Sharon Hollis
President
The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly



National Council of Churches in Australia



21 December 2022

The Hon Clare O'Neil MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: clare.oneil.mp@aph.gov.au

The Hon Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship
Migrant Services & Multicultural Affairs

andrew.giles.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Ministers

Christmas Greetings from the National Council of Churches and the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce (ACRT).

At this time of the year, as we read and celebrate the Christian story of the birth of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, we are reminded how the authorities react with violence and fear to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and with his parents, Joseph and Mary, the child Jesus becomes a refugee and flees to safety in Egypt.

In this world where over 104 million people are displaced by violent conflict, disaster and climate change, we would like to thank you and your government for steps taken to change Australia's migration and refugee resettlement program since the Federal Election.

Recent changes announced this week about permanent residency to be offered to 19,000 refugees in the community who are holding temporary visas for up to 10 years is very welcome and joyous news.

The recommendations of the migration review were also heartening in reaffirming the tremendous contribution of skilled migrants and refugees in building our nation. We believe that the values of compassion and hospitality towards these groups by the Australian community are important to ensuring a strong and resilient Australia.

Our ACRT members operate at community level and have daily interaction with refugees, people seeking asylum and living with long-term visa uncertainty. We thank you for moving on changing some of the systemic injustices and harm for these groups living in Australia. No doubt we will be in contact with you about further issues of concern in 2023 but we assure you that this is in a spirit of partnership to work with you.

Thank you, and may you be blessed with peace and joy this festive season.

Yours faithfully

General Secretary

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Anglican Church

Antiochian
Orthodox Church

Armenian
Apostolic Church

Assyrian Church
of the East

Chinese Methodist
Church

Churches of Christ

Congregational
Federation

Coptic
Orthodox Church

Greek
Orthodox Church

Indian
Orthodox Church

Lutheran Church

Mar Thoma Church

Religious Society
of Friends (Quakers)

Roman Catholic Church

Romanian
Orthodox Church

Syrian
Orthodox Church

The Salvation Army

Uniting Church

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Dear President and Synod Moderators

Attached Declaration of Faith and Intent of the ACC.

Grace and peace

Hedley

Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki
National Chair
Assembly of Confessing Congregations!
hedleyfihaki@gmail.com
0401698934

**DECLARATION OF FAITH AND INTENT OF
THE ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS Inc**

THE WAY INTO UNION – THE BASIS OF UNION

WHEREAS:

1. The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on 22nd June, 1977 by the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia after the approval of the “Basis of Union” by the Congregations, Councils and Courts of those three churches, guided by belief that they have being called by God into this union.
2. The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) is governed in accordance with the Basis of Union (BoU), the Constitution and regulations made pursuant to that Constitution. Under the BoU the Uniting Church undertakes and commits to live and work within the faith and unity of the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The BoU affirms the primacy of the Scriptures¹ and the Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by its use of the confessions known as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Uniting Church acknowledges the witness of the Reformers as expressed in the Scots Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Savoy Declaration. The Uniting Church listens to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons.²
3. The one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the ages has affirmed marriage as the ‘central symbol’ of God’s gift in creation’ with the UCA in 1997 arguing that marriage is the ‘unique sign’ of the unity which is promised in Christ³.

**ASSEMBLY DECISIONS R84 & R64 UNCONSTITUTIONAL – NOT GUIDED BY
THE BASIS OF UNION**

4. In July 2003 the National Assembly passed Resolution 84 (R84) that in essence approved two ‘mutually exclusive positions’ on sexual ethics. One holds to ‘celibacy in singleness & faithfulness in marriage (1987); the other to ‘right relationships’ (1997).

¹ ‘... by which ‘our’ faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.... And... Her message controlled by the Biblical Witness... (BoU, paragraph 5).

² Basis of Union, paragraph 10. All these documents, except the Scots Confession of Faith, mentions marriage as the union of a man and a woman. Marriage as male/female only union would have been the unquestioned understanding of the Church at the time of union.

³ Inter-Church marriages: Their ecumenical challenge and significance for our churches. Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia (1990). “Referring to Ephesians 5: 21-32 and Genesis 2: 24, the ‘report’ (of the Assembly Task Group on Sexuality 1997) argued that ‘marriage is the unique sign of the unity which is promised us in Christ’, and that the ‘Christian understanding of marriage considers it to be central symbol of God’s gift in creation’ (p.25-26).

The two positions are 'irreconcilable'.⁴ R84 was a momentous change in the Church's faith & practice.⁵

5. On the 13th July 2018 the Fifteenth Assembly of the UCA went further by making the radical move to redefine the Church's biblical and historic understanding of marriage to include same-sex marriage under the guise of 'religious and ethical diversity' (R64). This despite the warning by past President of the Uniting Church, Reverend Professor James Haire stating that "there is no overwhelming ecumenical, biblical or theological case in support' of such proposals, and that '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).⁶
6. By flouting Christ's affirmation of marriage and its significance as the central and unique symbol of Christ's relationship to the Church, the UCA's acceptance of same-gender marriage embeds this heresy into the Church's understanding of Christology and ecclesiology in a way that has not been directly stated previously. Adopting same-gender marriage completely alters the Church's doctrine of humankind, grounded in the creation of male and female, united in one flesh as husband and wife, and signifying the union of Christ and the church, to a neo-pagan, nihilistic and Gnostic doctrine that views persons as self-choosing agents of desire.⁷

IN THE LIGHT OF THE FOREGOING DECISIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE UCA, WE MAKE THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION:

7. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the living Head of the Church and that we are to move forward together in sole loyalty to Him⁸ and in 'obedience to the Holy Spirit'⁹.

⁴ Sermon by Rev. Dr. Max Champion

http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/Sermon_by_Rev_Dr_Max_Champion_after_UCA_Assembly_2003.pdf

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/Prof._James_Haire_Response_to_ASC_Same-Gender_Marriage_Report_and_Proposals.pdf

⁷ See the statement by Christians United in support of LGBTI+ Inclusion in the Church which invites a return to a Holy Spirit inspired, Christ centred re-reading of Scripture where, we find 'a more biblical understanding of sexuality and gender identity that magnifies the creativity of God and celebrates the wide diversity in God's creation of humanity.' Falsely claiming greater fidelity to Scripture, it undermines the clear biblical command concerning sexual relationships. In the name of gender fluidity, it demolishes the clear binary limit set by the Creator for human flourishing. Comments taken from paper by Rev. Dr. Max Champion 'ACC beyond the 15th Assembly'.

⁸ see the Basis of Union (BoU) paragraph 1

⁹ see the Uniting Church in Australia Constitution, paragraph 4

8. We believe that the 15th Assembly's decision on the 13th July 2018 known as Resolution 64 (R64) is a departure from the 'faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' to which the Basis of Union (BoU) commits us¹⁰.
9. We believe that by adopting a "diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings" as defined in R64, the 15th Assembly has significantly altered the doctrine and the nature of the Church from being a specifically and explicitly Christian One, to a 'multi-faith religion'.
10. By the decisions of 15th Assembly, the UCA Assembly has separated its understanding of truth (saving Gospel) from the understanding and principle of Holy Scripture. It has done this by renouncing a doctrine so comprehensively essential to the grammatical and theological fabric of the teaching of both the OT and NT, that its renunciation cannot but constitute the separation of Scripture from truth.
11. The Holy Scriptures are the only extant guarantee that God has given to His people whereby they have access to, and grounding in, His objective, divine truth (the saving truth of the Gospel). This principle and understanding is the position upheld by the *Basis of Union* of the UCA, the antecedent traditions that formed the UCA, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of which the UCA claims itself a member, and the many individuals, Congregations, networks and Presbyteries within the UCA that hold to orthodox Christianity.
12. In severing this crucial link, the UCA Assembly has also affirmed as an alternative and equivalent source of truth, existential, humanist thought, divorced from the understanding and principle of Holy Scripture. This source of truth no longer guarantees access to, nor grounding in, God's objective, divine truth (the saving truth of the Gospel).
13. The position of the UCA Assembly on the one hand, and that held by orthodox Christian members, congregations, networks and Presbyteries on the other, represent two contradictory and mutually exclusive understandings of truth, salvation, and therefore also of mission. This situation raises an essential impossibility of pursuing a common mission between these two respective positions.
14. We believe that the decision of the 15th Assembly was not 'guided by the Basis of Union' as required by the Constitution in paragraph 2 as there was 'no overwhelming ecumenical, biblical or theological' evidence to support the Assembly's decision.¹¹
15. The Constitution and the Basis of Union assert unequivocally that the 'Church lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church'.

¹⁰ see BoU paragraphs 2 & 3

¹¹ Rev. Prof. James Haire (May 2018) 'Response to the Assembly Standing Committee Report and Proposals on Marriage and Same-gender relationships (B23).

http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/Prof._James_Haire_Response_to_ASC_Same-Gender_Marriage_Report_and_Proposals.pdf

It is clear that the faith of the Church in terms of the witness of both the OT and NT rejects homosexual practice.

16. We believe that the 15th Assembly adopted R64 without following due process by not first putting the critical report of the Doctrine Working Group (DWG) for debate and for the formal reception of the Assembly.
17. We believe that R64 has created real division within the Church between adherence to the teachings of the Scriptures and that of the Church if R64 is also adhered to.¹² This has driven a wedge between the requirement to ‘live out the vision of the Basis of Union’ as required in the Code of Ethics¹³ and being ‘guided by the decisions of the Assembly’¹⁴. This introduced inconsistency makes it unworkable for those who hold to orthodoxy to both be ‘guided by the Basis of Union’; which sees marriage as only the union of a man and a woman¹⁵; and to also accept the decision of the 15th Assembly to adopt a new ethical standard that is contrary to the clear and unambiguous witness of Scripture and the Basis of Union.
18. We believe that R64 has instituted a new gospel that is void of the transforming power of the ‘Word of God on whom salvation depends’ (BoU paragraph 5; Romans 1: 16).
19. We believe that R64 has harmed ‘the eucharistic fellowship of the Church as the Body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 5-6)¹⁶ and as such, we can no longer participate together in Holy Communion with those who hold to R64.

A CALL FOR AMICABLE SEPARATION - THE DISSOLUTION OF UNION

20. We believe that R64 of the 15th Assembly of the UCA has itself created division and a situation that is unworkable and untenable. For those members, Ministers, Congregations, organizations and Presbyteries that hold to orthodox Christian faith, the current situation is not sustainable as a permanent state of affairs. By our membership, and Mission and Service Fund contributions, we are supporting the work of an organisation that contradicts the Word of God, acts contrary to it, and by virtue of which contradicts and undermines the mission of the Gospel of Christ. Further, the UCA Assembly and Synods have demonstrated that they will not allow the adherence to Christian Orthodoxy alone as demonstrated in its ‘disciplinary’ action against Ministers and Congregations who adhere to and advocate the orthodox position and reject R64.

¹² Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, paragraph 3.3

¹³ See Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, paragraph 3.3 (a)

¹⁴ Ibid, paragraph 3.3(f)

¹⁵ Basis of Union para. 10 speaks of marriage as only the Union of a man and woman in relation to The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), The Savoy Declaration (1658) and John Wesley’s 44 Sermons (1793). <https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/HistDocs/basisofunion1992.pdf>

¹⁶ http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/ACC_2006_Sexuality_Statement_R2019.pdf

21. We believe, as the ACT2 report¹⁷ recognises, that we ‘cannot in good conscience continue to maintain the status quo in the presence of such significant challenges and risks’.¹⁷
22. We believe we have reached a *kairos* moment, an “extraordinary time requiring and leading to renewed understandings, action and transformation – a change of life.... It is a moment of both urgency and grace, that wills us to be alert to God’s presence and invites us to partner with God to create a faithful future” (ACTS 2 Report).¹⁷
23. We call on the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia and the various councils of the Church as a whole to begin formal negotiations around amicable separation in order to release both the progressive stream and the conservative evangelical stream to live out peacefully each other’s respective faith in genuine freedom and without compromising their fundamental beliefs.¹⁸
24. We make a declaration of adherence to orthodox Christian faith *lone*, and therefore also of our opposition to the Assembly, and those Councils that have stated their agreement with the decisions of the 15th Assembly.
25. We believe that in entering into negotiations for an amicable separation from the UCA should include all aspects of church government, and all church and ministerial assets. So for example, a congregation that decides to separate from the UCA should be entitled to have transferred to a new trustee the property that the beneficial interest of the individual Churches have and likely brought into the Union in 1977.
26. We believe taking such action is also a matter of justice. Orthodox Christian Members and Ministers within the UCA are only holding to the Christian faith outlined in the *Basis of Union* from the time of the inception of the UCA - i.e. *they are holding true to what they signed up for*. It is the Assembly, and the Synods, that have moved from that position by adopting the position of the 15th Assembly – through what many consider very questionable processes. Many now have the feeling of being unjustly held ‘hostage’ against their consciences by the Assembly and Synods.
27. We believe, as stated above, that we cannot as a matter of conscience continue supporting the status quo, i.e. the illusion of ‘two integrities’. In particular, we believe that we must withhold support for any missional efforts of any council of the Church that accepts R64, other than for the purpose of negotiating an amicable path of freedom and separation for both streams. Payments required for services rendered including to congregations, to the Ministers and to Presbyteries in terms of administration, such as insurances, WHS compliance, working with vulnerable people and other charitable services etc., will continue to be made.

¹⁷ https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Act2-Paper_final.pdf, 19,

¹⁸ A model may be the one adopted by the United Methodist Church in America titled ‘Reconciliation and grace through separation’. <https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/the-agreement>

28. We cannot allow anyone, including minister, pastor or layperson who accepts R64 to preach in any of our congregations because of the significant difference in gospels that we now believe in.
29. We humbly request that the National Assembly and the various Synods desist from the intimidation, bullying and vilification of our people, Ministers and Congregations who reject R64 and adhere to the historic one catholic and apostolic faith; nor try to close down any more of our congregations unjustly and unfairly simply because of the position that we have taken.
30. We hereby make our stance, not in a spirit of defiance and rebellion against the National Assembly, but on the basis that in the same way the 15th Assembly was not empowered nor able to institute same-gender marriage ‘within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church’¹⁹, we too are not empowered nor able to live and work within the contradictory and untenable framework of R64.
31. We note that the Basis of Union states “*when the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses*”²⁰. Adherence to the Basis of Union means moving forward together in sole loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ of the Scriptures, the living Head of the Church and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

27 November 2022

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¹⁹ Constitution, paragraph 2

²⁰ Basis of Union, paragraph 5