



11 July 2006  
For immediate release

## **SEXUALITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITING CHURCH**

Following careful, and prayerful reflection and discernment the Uniting Church's 250 member National Assembly has been unable to come to one mind on the issue of accepting into leadership positions those living in committed same-gender relationships.

Acknowledging that there was a diversity of opinion within its membership, the Assembly today passed a resolution which re-affirms that matters relating to the placement and ordination of those living in committed same-gender relationships will continue to be made by the local Congregation and Presbytery on a case by case basis. This upholds the existing practice of the Church.

Uniting Church President, Rev. Gregor Henderson said Assembly members recognised this was an important issue for many members of the Church but that after lengthy discussions and spiritual discernment they had been unable to reach agreement as to whether the Assembly should further exercise determining responsibility on this issue and adopt a single policy to apply across the entire church.

"I am grateful for the gracious and respectful way that members of the Assembly addressed this issue. We were also deeply moved by the response of the Aboriginal arm of the church which, despite opposing the current practice, committed itself to remain within the fellowship of the Uniting Church. Our discussions over the last few days remind us that we have a range of deeply held convictions in our church on this issue and that we are not of the same mind at this time. Notwithstanding the hopes of many in the church, the Assembly resolved that it was unable to exercise further its determining authority in this matter.

"We have prayerfully sought to discern God's will on this matter and I believe we have reached a position of integrity at this time that allows us to live in unity with our diversity. The decision of the Assembly today recognises that there are a range of understandings about this issue.

"This decision re-affirms that congregations and presbyteries will continue to be the place where decisions around the ordination and placement of those living in committed same-gender relationships are made. Congregations who are unable, in all good conscience, to receive such a minister will not be compelled to do so. The resolution also calls the church to respect the decision of a congregation indicating its willingness to consider calling a minister in a committed same-gender relationship."

**A full copy of the resolution is attached**

**ENDS**



## SEXUALITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

The Assembly resolved:

### Preamble

In the struggle to be the Uniting Church in Australia, we affirm that our unity is our oneness in Jesus Christ; we acknowledge a variety of theological perspectives and biblical understandings which we maintain in tension within our life as a church, recognising that variety is a gift to the Church which allows most people to find a spiritual home amongst our many congregations and faith communities.

1. To acknowledge and lament that even though the decision of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding Sexuality and Leadership (*Assembly Minute 03.12.04, varied by Assembly Standing Committee Minute 03.69.03*) was made prayerfully and in good faith and according to UCA polity, it was a catalyst for the deep concern and disquiet present in some parts of the UCA.
2. To express its regret that following the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly there were some faithful ministers and members of the church who believed that because of the decision of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding Sexuality and Leadership (*Assembly Minute 03.12.04, varied by Assembly Standing Committee Minute 03.69.03*) they had no option but to withdraw from the Uniting Church altogether.
3. To express its regret that faithful Christian gay and lesbian people, on whose lives the Assembly deliberations have impacted, have continued to experience pain in our church.
4. To declare that the matter of Sexuality and Leadership is at heart a matter of faith and concerns our humanity in Christ.

### The 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly

5. To acknowledge:
  - a) that Assembly members are not of one mind regarding the issue of the acceptance into the specified ministries of those living in committed same-gender relationships; and
  - b) that some members of the Assembly adhere to traditional teaching and practice of Reformed and Evangelical churches in this matter, while others who also adhere to the Reformed and Evangelical tradition believe that God may be leading this tradition to a different understanding and practice;

and therefore, notwithstanding the hopes of many in the Church, the 11th Assembly, having prayerfully sought to discern God's will and after much deliberation, is not prepared to exercise further its determining responsibility in this matter.



## The Next Steps

6. Pursuant to clauses 38 of the Constitution, to advise Synods and Presbyteries;
  - a) that congregations who resolve that they are unable in conscience to receive into ministry placement a person living in a committed same-gender relationship, shall not be compelled to do so; and
  - b) to respect the decision of a congregation indicating its willingness to consider calling a minister in a committed same-gender relationship.
7. To encourage Congregations:
  - a) to be aware that within many Congregations there is a diversity of belief on matters of sexuality and leadership and that some members do not feel free to express their beliefs;
  - b) to become safe communities where people may hold diverse beliefs on these matters and work together as the Body of Christ; and
  - c) to recognise that the possibility of living with difference is a gift which Christ offers to the world.
8. To encourage the whole church:
  - a) to commit itself to continue to grapple with the implications of the gospel of God's grace for our humanity, the church's life, and participation in God's mission in the world;
  - b) to call on all members of the church who hold different views to work at living together in peace as members of the Body of Christ; and
  - c) to hope, pray and work for that common mind in faith which is Jesus Christ's gift and will.
9. To request the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine to engage in further work that assists the Church in our ongoing consideration of the theological diversity of the Church on this issue and to authorise the Assembly Standing Committee to determine the terms of reference for such work.
10. To acknowledge:
  - (a) that the Uniting Church is committed "to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church"; and
  - (b) that Christ continues to feed us with word and sacrament as we wait on God's living Word;

and to call the Uniting Church to re-commit itself to its primary purpose of "worship, witness and service" (Quotes are from the *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1).

**Media Contact: Gavin Melvin, Manager, National Media and Communication – 0417 416 674**



11. To request that the President consult with the Moderators in relation to a pastoral letter to the whole church.
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***Note: The contents of the pastoral letter may include***

- a) the matters referred to in the preamble*
- b) the contents of this resolution*
- c) a reflection of the nature and spirit of the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly discussions and contributions from the UAICC and Multicultural congregations*
- d) the longing of the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly for the day when those Christians who in conscience left congregations are reconciled with those Christians who remain within the UCA, and that we may unite in faith, hope and love.*