



A Church For All God's People



(This document was passed at the 11th Assembly in Brisbane in 2006)

As those called to be witnesses to the hope of reconciliation, we renew our commitment to being a multicultural and cross-cultural community.

As God's diverse people, united in Christ, we embrace the vision of being a Church for all God's People.

(1) Introduction

Since time immemorial God has been present in this land. We acknowledge the Creator of the universe and the unique place of Indigenous people in God's creative plan for the land we call Australia. We look towards the time when the faith and spirituality of Indigenous people can truly shape who we are as a Church. We acknowledge Christ as the source of unity and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit who is ever renewing God's people. The diversity we have in the body of Christ is God's gift to us. Learning to understand one another and celebrate our differences is both a joyful and painful journey. We seek to be a community that is open to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us.

(2) Biblical Underpinnings

All human beings are created by God in the image and likeness of God! (Genesis 1: 26-27, 10:32, Psalm 24:1)

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it". God has created the world with great diversity ('of every kind' – Gen 1). All human beings share a fundamental unity. We are connected to one another, part of the wholeness and goodness of God's creation. We are all made in the image of God. Despite our sinfulness, God's covenantal promise is with all of creation, all people and all generations (Gen 9:9-12). The story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11) reminds us of the danger of monocultural arrogance and affirms cultural and linguistic differences as part of God's plan for humanity. From one ancestor God made all the nations (Acts 17: 26).

Welcome the stranger (Genesis 18: 1-8, Exodus 22: 21, 23:9; Leviticus 19: 33; Deuteronomy 10: 19 and 24: 17-18)

Israel was required to exercise justice and compassion to strangers. In the Biblical stories there are many examples of God coming in the form of a stranger. In Genesis 18: 1-8 Abraham offered hospitality to the three strangers who turned out to be God's messengers. Strangers enhance rather than diminish the life of communities (Luke 24: 13-35, Acts 10: 34, Romans 12: 13, Hebrews 13: 2).

Go... to the Land that I show you (Gen 12: 12)

Abraham and Sarah heard God's call to leave their country and venture in faith into the unknown. Our cross-cultural ministry is heir to this tradition. We are called to go where God sends us and be a blessing to the nations. The biblical tradition is full of people who go on crossing journeys- for example Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Exodus, Naomi and Ruth, Daniel, Jonah, Esther, Jeremiah. Those exiled in Babylon were told to plant gardens, build houses and seek the welfare of the city they were in (Jeremiah 29: 4-8). At times with faith and at times with despair, God's people are called to move into new situations. They discover God's will for them in a new land. As they struggle with issues of identity they come to a deeper understanding of who they are as God's people and who is the God who sustains them.

Jesus crossed cultural boundaries

Jesus conversed with a Samaritan woman, acknowledged the faith of a Syrian-Phoenician woman, praised a Roman centurion and a Samaritan leper, ate with outcasts, crossed over 'to the other side' and reached out with compassion to those who were marginalised by his religious

community. He shows us that love rather than fear needs to determine relationships (John 4:7-10; Mark 7: 26, 29; Mat 8: 10; Luke 17: 16, Luke 10: 37, Mark 3: 5-6; Luke 13: 13-14; Matt 9: 29, 32, Matt 15: 28, Mark 4: 35, Luke 10: 25-37).

Hospitality is the hallmark of the kingdom community

Jesus challenged religious leaders to invite to their table the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind (Luke 14: 1, 7-14, Matt 25). His parable of the great banquet offered a picture of the generous hospitality of God reaching out to invite those who had been excluded. In the Kingdom, "People will come from north, south, east and west and feast together" (Luke 13: 9). Paul told the church in Rome to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom 15:7).

The Church born at Pentecost is multicultural from the beginning

The church born at Pentecost was a multicultural church. When the Spirit came, each was able to hear the good news in their own native language (Acts 2: 8). The unity they discovered was not uniformity. The first council in Jerusalem, after hearing of the story of Cornelius and Peter, came to recognise that God calls people of all races, languages and cultures. By the power of the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles now belong to the body of Christ. Baptised believers share an equality in Christ (Ephesians 2: 19, Galatians 3: 28). Christ transcends all differences and the Christian community is a new creation in Jesus Christ. Old divisions are broken down and a new unity is created (1 Corinthians 15, Ephesians 2: 11-19). Gentile Christians are told they are equal members in God's family "You are no longer strangers and sojourners but fellow citizens and saints with members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2: 19)

"...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language..."

The vision of the heavenly banquet includes people from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7: 9).

The 'Promised End' is indeed multicultural. Rev 7: 12 offers a vision of an innumerable multitude of every nation, tribe, race and language each praising God in their own language. The rainbow mix of people we have within the Church today can be seen as a foretaste of life in the heavenly kingdom and a reminder that ... 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Isaiah 56: 6-8, Jeremiah 29).

(3) Key Principles for Building a Cross-cultural Community

(i) Affirming our unity and diversity in Christ

A Church for all God's People is founded on the understanding that each person is made in the image of God and we share a fundamental unity. Through Christ we are members of the one household of God (Ephesians 2: 19) and we discover a family resemblance not based on colour, language, ethnicity or race. We have a 'foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation' (Basis of Union Par 3). The unity the Spirit gives does not create uniformity but calls people of all races, languages and cultures to share together in one family. People of different cultural groups worship in different languages and operate in some distinctive ways while at the same time striving to work together and enrich one another. They belong together in the body in Christ, are united by a common faith in the triune God and they value the diverse gifts God has given.

(ii) Mutual Sharing and Learning

People are created to live in community. Sharing life together as people from different backgrounds and cultural traditions is central part of the Biblical witness. As a cross-cultural community we will seek to provide space for people of different cultural groups to maintain language, cultural patterns and traditions that are life giving. A Church for all God's People urges members to share their experience and learn from others as we embark on a journey of cross-cultural learning, open to the transformation which the Spirit brings.

(iii) Hospitality and Inclusiveness

Hospitality is the hallmark of the kingdom community Jesus proclaimed. People from different ethnic backgrounds take up their place, contribute their gifts and participate as equals. A Church for all God's People is inclusive of all peoples and cultures, women and men, young and old.

(iv) Living out the Gospel of Hope and Reconciliation in God's World

A Church for all God's People is a sign of hope pointing to the reconciling power of the living Christ. Such a Church recognises the place of Australia's first peoples, advocates for justice and peace, supports migrants and refugees, builds inclusive communities and reaches out to witness and serve. Such a Church is part of God's transforming work in the world and in the lives of people. Christ invites us to live in ways that herald in a new creation. As the wider Australian community changes and new challenges emerge in the world, a Church of all God's People seeks flexible and life-giving models of church life that foster new models of ministry. A Church of all God's people promotes cross-cultural learning, challenges prejudice, develops and trains people for mission in cross-cultural settings, fosters new leadership and reflects respect, justice, love, equality and partnership in all relationships.

(4) AFFIRMATION – A CHURCH FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE

Called to be witnesses to the hope of reconciliation, we renew our commitment to being a Church for all God's People

Within the life of our nation we will:

- (i) Recognise the place of Australia's first peoples and work for reconciliation
- (ii) Reflect the love of Christ for all people
- (iii) Contribute to building an inclusive Australian society
- (iv) Seek to minister effectively within a culturally diverse society and build bridges with people of different cultures and faiths

As a welcoming community we will:

- (v) Be open to receive from one another, sharing the hospitality of Christ
- (vi) Affirm and celebrate cultural diversity, and let that diversity be a resource for ministry
- (vii) Overcome prejudice and racism and develop a spirituality of trust, respect and mutuality
- (viii) Encourage all members to embark on a journey of cross-cultural learning

As a community made up of people from many different backgrounds and cultures we will:

- (ix) Provide space for people from different cultural groups to maintain language and cultural patterns and traditions that are life giving
- (x) Reflect ethnic diversity in a visible way in our worship, life and leadership
- (xi) Encourage people from different backgrounds to take up their place in the life of the church and contribute to its life
- (xii) Seek to meet the needs of our diverse membership and develop policies and processes to assist the full participation of all members

As a community at mission we will:

- (xiii) Encourage the development of culturally diverse congregations
- (xiv) Form, develop and train people for ministry in cross-cultural settings
- (xv) Ensure equality and partnership in the sharing of resources so that property is a resource for the ministry and mission of the whole people of God
- (xvi) Utilise the gifts of all of God's people
- (xvii) Be open to the transformation which the Spirit brings!

PRAYER

God our Creator, you brought this Uniting Church into being
You have called us to be your diverse and multi-coloured people
Show us how to value one another as those made in your image

Christ Jesus

You reached out across the barriers that divided Jews, Samaritans and Romans,
Enable us to cross the barriers that separate us from one another

Holy Spirit,

You are the Giver of Unity,

Unite your people in love that we may be a community of justice, love and reconciliation -
A Church for all God's People!

Amen