



One Body, many members – Living faith and life cross-culturally

(Adopted by the 13th Assembly, 2012 in Adelaide)



Introduction

In 1985 the 4th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declared the UCA to be a multicultural Church. That Declaration contained a number of expectations about what such a declaration means in the day to day life, structures and process of the Uniting Church – see paragraphs 5 to 9. These have not yet been taken up in a comprehensive way across the local, regional and national life of the UCA.

At the 11th Assembly in 2006 a further affirmation was adopted acknowledging that such a church was “For all God’s people”. Arising from those statements and giving shape and purpose to them for the sake of our faithful witness in word and deed, we make the following statement of Christian conviction:

Commitment – giving shape and content to the intent

The 13th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, rejoicing in its diversity of races, cultures, and languages as God’s gracious gifts, calls upon the Uniting Church in Australia in all its settings to be a true multicultural church living its faith and life cross-culturally.

The 13th Assembly recognizes the following as faithful marks of a multicultural church living its faith and life cross-culturally and commits the UCA to shaping its life and witness to God in Christ by them:

A MULTICULTURAL¹ CHURCH, LIVING ITS FAITH AND LIFE CROSS-CULTURALLY²

1. IN WORSHIP AND RESPONSE TO THE CREATOR GOD: celebrates, confesses and acts out its faith in the one sovereign God who through Jesus Christ binds in covenant faithful people of all races, ethnicities, cultures and languages.

2. RECEIVES CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AS GOD’S GIFTS AND:

- embodies these diversities as gracious gifts of the Creator God to the human family,
- rejoices in the variety of God's grace, and
- lives out its life and witness cross-culturally as a sign and promise of hope within multicultural, multiracial and multifaith Australia in the 21st century.

3. SPEAKS TRUTHFULLY: as it is called by God through Jesus Christ to acknowledge and confess its sins of racism and to repent and refrain from all acts of racial discrimination and bigotry to the First peoples of this land and to all Second peoples of differing race, culture and language within its own life and practise.

4. EMBRACES THEOLOGICAL RICHNESS AND DIFFERENCE: affirming Christian unity while celebrating the theological, biblical and liturgical richness and difference that arises from its racial, cultural and linguistic diversity.

5. WITHIN THE MISSION OF GOD: responds to God’s call through the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission of doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God through Christ in all communities, with all peoples, in all places moving towards the fulfilled reign of God which will be multicultural (see Revelation 5:9-10).

6. THROUGH INCLUSIVE MINISTRY:

- the calling, placement and standing of ministers in the church will be carried out in inclusive, just and equitable ways locally, regionally, nationally, globally and ecumenically, and
- paying particular attention to the needs of language/culturally specific congregations/faith communities.

7. **IN RACIALLY JUST STRUCTURES:** works to coordinate strategies and involve the entire membership of the church in making justice and equity a reality in the whole of UCA life and structures, in multicultural and multi-faith Australian society, and across the world.
8. **ENGAGES IN PROPHETIC ADVOCACY:** and public policy development on the issues of racial, social, economic and environmental justice with particular concern as to how these issues impact the quality of life of people of minority communities in Australia and throughout the world.
9. **VALUES AND DEVELOPS INTENTIONAL MULTILINGUAL MINISTRIES:** by encouraging its ministry leaders in their initial training and continuing education to learn a second language and become familiar with other cultures in order to minister cross-culturally more intentionally, effectively and sensitively.
10. **DEVELOPS MULTILINGUAL RESOURCES IN FIRST LANGUAGES:** and makes them readily available for use throughout the church. This is in addition to facilitating the translation of all official church documents such as the Basis of Union, Constitution and Bylaws, Creeds or statements of faith into languages that are the first language of people within local congregations and faith communities.
11. **IS COMMITTED TO EDUCATION AND FORMATION FOR DISCIPLESHIP:** by preparing Christian multilingual education resources consistent with the Basis of Union that are relevant to the diversity of expressions of Christian life and faith, forming and equipping of disciples within the church and to 21st century multicultural, multiracial and multifaith Australia. It provides those resources and training programs in a wide variety of culturally sensitive and appropriate learning, teaching and assessment styles.
12. **ENGAGES IN EVANGELISM, AND NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT:** by developing, supporting and implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies for evangelism and the establishment, development and inclusion of new faith communities and congregations. These will challenge and invite every member of local faith communities and congregations to move beyond traditional comfort zones to live out God's call in 21st century multicultural and multi-faith Australia, and not simply transplant ways from the 'home' environment.
13. **PROVIDES MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING APPROPRIATE TO ITS DIVERSITY:** and expects its theological colleges and lay education centres to expand curriculum development and educational programs to include awareness and knowledge concerning the rich diversity of cultural heritages, theological traditions, biblical insights that are part of the gifts of the world church, now also part of this increasingly diverse UCA. This process will include diverse teaching and assessment practices that are respectful of the racial, cultural and linguistic diversity of the church.
14. **PRACTICES FAITHFUL AND EQUITABLE STEWARDSHIP:** through intentional planning and implementation of strategies to help ensure and promote a faithful, just and equitable stewardship and sharing of the gifts of God's people, and the financial and property resources of the church for the empowerment of all local churches. In particular towards the empowerment of local cultural and linguistically diverse congregations and faith communities that have been marginalized due to racial discrimination in society.
15. **PRACTICES AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:** by accomplishing specific affirmative action goals and objectives within agreed time frames.
16. **MONITORS ACTION AND PROGRESS IN ITS CROSS-CULTURAL LIFE:** through the establishment of a body and processes through which to monitor all settings of the church on matters of:
- cultural and linguistic inclusion and exclusion in the UCA's worship, witness and service,
 - training and placement of ministry agents and programs, and
 - equitable and just sharing of resources for ministry.

[1] "Multicultural" is used in this context to indicate the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterise the whole of Australian life. The term is used to describe a reality – we are 'many'.

[2] The term 'cross-cultural' describes our calling by God in Christ as to how to live our lives in respectful relationships with one another across and between cultural boundaries and divides and always under the cross of Christ, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Uniting Church in Australia

One Body, many members – living faith and life cross-culturally

The 13th Assembly, meeting in Adelaide in 2012 resolved to:

1. Adopt the Statement, “One Body, many members - Living faith and life cross-culturally” (Appendix A to the Report of Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry)
2. Commit its Officers, Staff, Agencies, Task Groups, and Committees, and calls upon all members and leaders, Councils and Agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia to live out our common faith and life cross-culturally by using the characteristics outlined in the document “One Body, many members – Living faith and life cross-culturally” as benchmarks to shape the whole life of the UCA in:
 - a) acts of public worship, witness and service in multicultural, multiracial and multifaith Australia;
 - b) celebrating and using God’s gifts of theological, biblical and liturgical richness that arises from our cultural and linguistic diversity;
 - c) intentionally seeking ways to represent the genuine cultural and linguistic diversity of the church and not particular cultural or language groups in elections for and appointments to Councils, Task Groups and Committees;
 - d) using culturally sensitive, inclusive and equitable procedures for the recognition of calling, determination of placement and standing of those in designated ministries of the Uniting Church in Australia;
 - e) continuing to support the development and dissemination of multilingual resources in first languages and thought forms for use throughout the UCA, including Church signs;
 - f) continuing to engage in effective prophetic advocacy and public policy development on the issues of racial, social, economic and environmental justice;
 - g) expanding curriculum development and educational programs to include awareness and knowledge concerning the diversity of cultural heritages, theological and biblical traditions and insights, teaching and learning styles, and in-language assessment of our multicultural and multiracial world: for discipleship education and training, formation of candidates for specified ministries, in-service/continuing education programs for leaders, ministers and elders;
 - (h) encouraging ministers and leaders in the UCA to acquire a second language and to participate in immersion experiences in another culture/language community in order to make their ministry gifts and leadership available more widely and equitably across the UCA.
 - (i) exploring, developing, supporting and implementing culturally and contextually appropriate strategies concerning evangelism and resourcing for new church establishment, development and ministry support in racially, culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
 - (j) planning and implementing strategies to help ensure and promote a faithful, equitable and just stewardship and sharing of the financial and property resources of the UCA for the empowerment of all local congregations and faith communities;
 - (k) the racial, cultural and linguistic diversity of the writers, content of articles and photo and other images used in UCA publications and publicity materials; and
3. Urges the whole church to accept an ethic of accountability in our relationships with each other in all settings of the UCA in these matters by reporting progress and areas of difficulty in regular reporting to one another.

Rationale:

The 1985 Declaration “The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church”. In 1985, the UCA Assembly claimed its identity in Christ as ‘a multicultural church’ and made a formal declaration to that effect: “The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church”.

Paragraphs 5 to 9 of “The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church” included some key and far reaching actions/characteristics that spoke of how such a church would look and the breadth of change that living into and out of such a declaration would bring.

Further action by the Assembly

As a result of this Declaration and in trying to respond to what flows from it, meetings of the Assembly over the next 2 decades produced a number of reports, policy documents, workshops, courses and other resources:

- Assisting the UCA to understand the implications of this decision for our life together, our worship and expressions of our faith, our use of the richness and diversity of God-given gifts
- Embedding this identity and its implications and opportunities for change and renewal into the web and fabric of our life and identity, theology and understanding and use of Scripture as the United Church in Australia
- Equipping members and leaders in exercising their ministries and leadership in the most inclusive, effective, respectful and enriching ways for living out the Gospel of grace and the hospitality of God for all peoples

In 2006, the 11th Assembly received a report on progress on this journey. It noted significant progress and major difficulties in the ways in which the UCA was living out the 1985 declaration. It also adopted a statement which models the style of corporate life that characterises a multicultural church using biblical stories, images and mandates: A Church for all God's people.

With all the progress that has been made, what is still missing?

What continues to be missing in the time since 1985 has been a framework that illustrates and shapes the character and structure of such a multicultural church, living its faith cross-culturally. This reality was named clearly in that original Declaration and in the 'characteristics' for the UCA's life and ethos that flow from it and are named so clearly in it.

This proposal is offered as a means by which those commitments included in the 1985 Declaration can be given a formative place within our everyday life and witness in order to assist us to move forward deliberately in every aspect of our diverse and often chaotic life together, under the wise guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in the spirit of the Basis of Union.

For example:

- Para #1: ... open to constant reform ... and wider union...
- Para #2: ... witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries ...
- Para #3: ... the gift of the H/S to all people ... as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation ...
- Para #4: ... a church gathered in Christ's own strange way, constituted, ruled and renewed...
- Para #13: ... all members endowed with gifts, no gift without corresponding service, all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ, provision for the exercise of those gifts bestowed by God and ordering of the church's life in ... response to God's call to enter more fully into mission...
- Para's #17 and #18: ... constant review and revision of law ...in order that it [the UCA] may better serve the Gospel ... so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ ... All because we are on a journey of God's choosing and therefore we pray ... that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory ...