

# CROSS Purposes

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The present issue marks a sort of silver jubilee for *Cross Purposes*. Thank you to our faithful readership for your continuing support and interest.

For this issue's *In Service*, we invited Peter Bentley of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations to provide a reflection on where the ACC has come to and its continuing place in the Uniting Church. Peter gives an outline of the structure and objects of the ACC and some of the work it is doing to further these objects.

Norman Young's sermon for the anniversary of the Uniting Church's inauguration adopts the race-running imagery of the Letter to the Hebrews, arguing that the church is engaged in a relay race in which no generation is complete without those that go before and come after.

The *credo* series continues with a contribution from Peter Gador-Whyte taking up the statement in the Apostles' Creed that Christ "descended into hell". Peter addresses the place of Holy Saturday in the life and calendar of the church, claiming a distinctive importance for this day in confronting the reality of Christ's death and our own. His piece concludes with a suggested liturgy for the observance of Holy Saturday.

Wes Campbell addresses the question of Christian pacifism through a review of John Howard Yoder's critical essays on Barth, in the context of his own journey in pacifism from the Vietnam War to the present.

Adam McIntosh responds to Joan Wright Howie's reflection in the last *CP* on spirituality and contemporary society. Developing the theme of God's longing for us, Adam emphasizes the importance of this God's *identity*, and argues for a Christian understanding of spirituality grounded in God's nature as triune.

Finally, David Carter reviews Marcus Borg's recent book on redeeming Christian language, *Speaking Christian*.

## in service

Peter Bentley

## The Assembly of Confessing Congregations a renewed community with a rich heritage

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) continues the rich heritage of renewal and reform groups within the UCA and its antecedent churches. The main groups that had input into the present formation of the ACC through leadership and their common heritage within the UCA were the Fellowship for Revival, Evangelical Members within the UCA (EMU), and the Reforming Alliance (RA). During the years 2008-10, the state branches of EMU (state based organisation), and the Reforming Alliance (a national association) formally closed, and members were encouraged to join the

Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church. The ACC has focussed on congregational membership as the basis for its direction, but it is well supported by a network of individual supporting members. Congregational and group members are listed in the state movement section of our website, [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com).

ACC itself was established following the 2006 UCA Assembly which had failed to affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ as attested in scripture concerning sexual practice. A joint summit of members from EMU and RA on 12 July 2006 agreed to

establish an "Assembly of Confessing Congregations". The previous organizations had attempted to make their confession heard within the established councils of the Uniting Church, including proposals at the eleventh Assembly, but it was clear by then that a distinct confession by an Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church was the best way for the whole UCA to again hear the clear word of Jesus Christ.

The motto adopted by the ACC sums up the foundation:

*Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ  
Proclaiming the Truth*

### *Renewing the Church*

Confessing movements have a long and honourable tradition of protest within the churches. Since the sixteenth-century Reformation, confessional churches have affirmed their faith in opposition to what they regarded as false teaching of one kind or another. Today, throughout the Western world, confessing movements have developed within most mainline denominations, especially in North America.

Confessing Christ never takes place in a vacuum. It is made in the midst of a concrete threat to his lordship. As a Confessing movement we call the whole church to reaffirm

the “evangelical substance” of classical Christian faith. The confessing movement within the UCA names and stands against heresy, but also acknowledges the complicity of our own members to the development of the situation in which we are in today. Thus, confessing the Lordship of Christ also involves confessing one’s own sin.

ACC deliberately chose the word *Assembly* because it is not merely an association of members. ACC believes that the UCA Assembly acted in an apostate manner and violated its own processes of decision making. We hope people understand our use of the term *Assembly* conveys the seriousness of the nature of the confessing movement within the Uniting Church. ACC has however avoided words which are used in the UCA to denote a component part of the other councils of the Uniting Church.

It is instructive to include the *Objects of the ACC* as these clearly outline that the ACC desires to encourage the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA’s *Basis of Union*. These link the heritage of former renewal groups with the future.

The objects of the Association shall be:

- a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
  - i) upholding the Scriptures’ prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church’s faith and life;
  - ii) calling the Uniting Church to determine matters of doctrine and ethics

according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

- iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution;
- iv) providing biblically grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;
- v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and
- vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

- b) To undertake such other religious, educational or other charitable activities that are incidental to the above objects.<sup>1</sup>

During the initial years of foundation, the ACC has prepared a series of statements to highlight its theological stance and position on several issues within the UCA. Several of these documents have been translated into other languages and are available on the ACC website. These include the ACC Charter; a Statement on Vision and Goals; a Cross Cultural Statement; a Social Responsibility Statement and the ACC Theological Declaration. The theological document is a central resource for the ACC and has an accompanying commentary to help people study and understand the foundation of our Assembly.

In response to the charter, which commits the ACC to “bring a vigorous biblical perspective to contemporary

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the Rules (Constitution) of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, approved 21 May 2007.

public issues in a society that is increasingly ignorant about or hostile to orthodox Christianity”, the ACC has also begun to prepare statements on a variety of contemporary topics, including abortion, euthanasia and marriage, to provide ACC members within the UCA with guidance during these challenging times.

A second website, [unitingviews.com](http://unitingviews.com), was established in 2010 to provide a general space for the publication of papers and responses to specific issues within the Uniting Church. Resources have also been developed, including a series of bible studies prepared by the Discipleship and Evangelism Commission, with accompanying DVD resources.

Our magazine, *ACC Catalyst*, commenced in June 2007. Since 2010 it has been published every second month and is now widely read. It received two awards at the 2010 Australasian Religious Press Association Conference. Complimentary copies are sent to the Assembly, UAICC, Synods and Presbyteries and a variety of other UCA agencies.

ACC became an incorporated association in 2007, and meets as a community each year in a different state for the purpose of the AGM, which is held within a conference format. Themes have included “the church”, “marriage and family”, and this year, “evangelism”.

The ACC was established for the long term, and thus has a structure, including a number of specialist commissions, that enables interaction with the variety of bodies within the UCA as needed, and also with the wider Christian community. An active Prayer Network

has provided a community of prayer throughout the different state movements. As an incorporated association, the ACC is able to undertake its own ministry initiatives, and ACC officers and members frequently visit ACC congregations and groups to preach and lead seminars.

The ACC has experienced a range of reactions from within the UCA. Initially there was some formal contact with the UCA Assembly, but now there is less formal contact, though the ACC has continued to communicate to the National President by letter, some of which have been published in our magazine. This has helped our members to be kept abreast of continuing issues before the UCA and its direction. Other UCA leaders and groups are contacted, often on matters of concern, but also to encourage those who are upholding the faith “according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the *Basis of Union*”.

It would appear that some leaders in the UCA would prefer the ACC to disappear; some even experience apoplexy when the name is mentioned, but others seem to genuinely believe it is good for the UCA, especially citing the UCA’s promulgation of diversity, or the fact it has enabled many members to continue their membership within the UCA. Whatever views the UCA has, the ACC exists not for its own sake, but for the UCA and also for the wider church during this season of challenge and changing belief and practice.

PETER BENTLEY is the Executive Consultant (staff person) for the ACC.