

**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**  
The Assembly  
Board of Christian Education  
and the  
Committee for National Mission and Evangelism  
  
**Discipleship Education Resources Joint Project**

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N M & E Committee  
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**REPORT FOR MEETINGS IN MAY, 1990**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The interest of the church in discipleship goes back to the origin of the church itself. In the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel Jesus gives the disciples what is often called the Great Commission. Jesus said to his followers, "Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt.28:19 T.E.V.) The church is called by Jesus to make disciples, to be disciples and to grow in discipleship.
- 1.2 The Joint Board of Christian Education is charged with the responsibility of developing the educational ministry of the church for people of all ages. National Mission and Evangelism is being called on to ensure that the people of the Uniting Church are equipped for mission and empowered for their ministry in the world.
- 1.3 It is appropriate, therefore, that the two agencies work together on developing plans and resources that aim to lift the level of discipleship education in the Uniting Church in the next few years.

## 2. Developing the Concept

2.1 Shortly after Dr. John Brown was appointed to the position of Secretary for National Mission and Evangelism in 1985 he expressed his view that one area where National Mission and Evangelism could help the church was by encouraging more people to study the Bible that they may effectively live for Jesus Christ.

2.2 The Joint Board of Christian Education has had on its agenda for several years the further development of the program of Adult Education. The introduction of Kerygma: the Bible at depth, has meant that many people are receiving an overview of the Bible and encouraging each other in their study and understanding of the Bible. Dr. David Merritt brought the Joint Board thinking into focus with a paper he presented to Lay Educators in the Joint Board Network in June 1989. Some of the points made in that paper by David Merritt include:-

i) There is a need for a more comprehensive and more effective approach to encouraging adult education in the faith.

ii) An effective strategy would include:-

- a strong attention to motivation
- clear suggestions about what to do
- multiple models

- providing these elements:-

study of the Bible  
sharing of personal experiences  
exposure to the best theological  
thinking  
strong links of action and reflection  
methods which involve feelings

iii) The main elements of discipleship are:-

- living our lives every day responding to God's grace - living every day the

Jesus way

- engaging in service in the community or church
- regular involvement with other Christians in worship
- regular nurturing of the personal spiritual life.

v) Other important elements

- an emphasis on living skills
- identification of gifts and knowledge of where they can be used
- support and training to improve service
- the linking of experience of service in the community with the life of the church
- the need for motivated, informed and skilled people to make the program work
- the need to identify the vision and practical strategies
- the need for a coalition of education and mission and evangelism agencies.

2.3 The publication **What Future for the Church?** and the various resolutions by The Assembly and its Standing Committee that went with it provided for National Mission and Evangelism some of the parameters for its work. **What Future for the Church?** stressed that a nation-wide initiative was needed. This initiative would encourage every council and body within the church to direct its energies and resources towards:-

- discovering new forms of renewal in worship
- motivating the members of the church for mission, witness and service in their situation
- bridging the gulf between the church and groups in the community
- making disciples
- engaging in appropriate mission work through other councils.

It was clear that The Assembly through the document saw that "making disciples" was a crucial activity.

- 2.4 i) A meeting took place on November 2nd, 1989 between people from the Joint Board network involved in Christian Education and the National Mission and Evangelism network involved in mission and evangelism. Both John Brown and David Merritt were involved. Because of the structures of the Synod Departments in Western Australia and Queensland people like John Smith and John Mavor bridged both areas of concern.
- ii) Following that meeting both John Brown and David Merritt wrote papers. These papers were considered by the NM & E Committee. David Merritt's paper was before the Joint Board.
- iii) These papers were integrated into the document **Developing Resources for Discipleship** which came over John Brown's signature on November 25th, 1989.
- 2.5 i) Whilst the paper is a description of planning decisions made by the joint group on November 2nd there was an awareness of decisions taken by National Mission and Evangelism and the Joint Board, subsequent to that date. The Joint Board had agreed to proceed and NM & E with more caution had agreed to proceed but stressed they did not want John Mavor deflected from what they perceived to be his main task of developing "Mission 2000" or "Forge the Links" or whatever it was going to be called.

2.5.2 The main points of agreement set out in the paper of 25/11/89 are:-

- i) It is important to develop resources for discipleship education.
- ii) To ask the two agencies concerned:
- to agree to work together on the task
  - to both appoint two people to a planning group for the project - two of the four appointed to be the Secretary for NM & E and Executive Director of the JBCE.

- to ask the planning group to prepare further proposals.
- iii) To ask John Mavor as Secretary of NM & E to conduct a series of consultations in the Synods with both Christian Education and Mission and Evangelism Staff that would:
- inform Synod agencies of the plan
  - encourage enthusiasm about the plan
  - seek ideas about the resources
  - begin planning about how the resource would be used in the Synods
  - obtain contacts who were involved in discipleship education
  - identify community programs that can be instructive about methods of adult learning.
- iv) Both of the co-operating agencies were asked to make available up to \$20,000 for the initiation of the project.
- v) A competent educator was to be sought to commence some of the research required and subsequently to supervise the development of modules in the learning plan and to supervise the testing of them.
- vi) It was noted that the development of discipleship education will involve consultation with all Assembly agencies but especially the Committee on Social Responsibility and Justice.
- vii) The paper then set out a timetable for the various things to happen.

### 3. The Situation as at 30/4/90

- 3.1 A great deal has happened since the paper of 25/11/89 was distributed.
- 3.2 The Joint Board welcome the opportunity for the two Agencies to work together; appointed Dr. David Merritt as the Joint Board's Co-convenor of the program; indicated that their second representative would be decided on the basis of whether the meeting was being

held in Melbourne or Sydney (or elsewhere); indicated that they would be willing to make a financial commitment but because of budget pressures they could not authorise the full amount requested immediately but did authorise the expenditure of \$5,000 and indicated that any further amounts would require further consideration.

- 3.3
  - i) The National Mission and Evangelism Committee had received an earlier draft of the proposal and asked John Brown to re-draft it. This was done for the document of 25/11/89. The Sydney members of the Committee meeting early in 1990 had agreed that John Mavor and Jack Hoadley be the two representatives of NM & E to the project.
  - ii) John Brown was successful in asking the Commission for Mission that \$20,000 from the unspent section of the NM & E budget for 1989 be allocated for work in 1990 of which the Discipleship Education Resources would be a major part.
- 3.4 John Mavor began work in late January 1990. The major focus of his work was to find a name for and develop the content of the assignment which the NM & E Committee had been given of **"proposing ways and means of increasing the missionary impact of the church...."** It became clear that **"discipleship education"** was an essential part of ***"Forward Together."***
- 3.5 Mr. Peter Bentley, a member of the Uniting Church, with skills in research, journalism and history was recruited in January 1990 to undertake the urgent research needed to move the Discipleship Education project forward at the necessary speed. Peter Bentley worked on an agreed plan developed by David Merritt and John Mavor. He interviewed people in the Uniting Church, other churches, in academic institutions and in adult education agencies in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. A summary of some of the main points of his report is given later in this document.

3.6 During February and March John Mavor visited most Synods within the Assembly. Meetings were held between Education staff in all states except New South Wales and that meeting is planned for May 17th, 1990. The agenda for these meetings had been worked out in consultation by the co-convenors. The question placed before the staff groups were:-

- what good things about discipleship education are happening in the congregations of this synod?
- what methods seem to work particularly well?
- are there particular synod or presbytery programs that relate to discipleship education?
- what are the faith questions on discipleship issues with which people in the congregations need help?
- where are people in the community hurting and what do we need to do in discipleship education so that people of the church can be with them at these points?
- are there people in the community who would be good sources of ideas about discipleship education?
- what help will be needed at the level of congregations, presbyteries and synods if discipleship education is to be effective?

These questions were also placed before individuals and other groups of people such as presbytery mission committees and home fellowship groups. The responses have generated a lot of data which has been used in the preparation of this document.

3.7 The proposal accepted in November 1989 indicated that John Mavor should prepare a report in April 1990 for the meetings in early May of NM & E Committee and the Joint Board of Christian Education.

#### 4. Some points from Peter Bentley's Report

4.1 One of the main things to impress Peter Bentley was the amount of adult education that is happening in the life of the churches. The Uniting Church is certainly one of the churches seriously committed to helping adults to learn and grow in their faith and life.

4.2 Much of the education undertaken in the church continues to be teacher-directed in its methodology. There has however been a marked move towards methodologies which are learner centred. For example, inductive techniques, self directed learning, experiential learning and the action-reflection process are now used widely. Related to the uses of these is the development of small groups. One of the questions raised by Peter Bentley was whether there was sufficient reflection on the life of the group. It is easy for small groups to become a method rather than a learning experience.

#### 4.3 Educational Trends in Secular Environments

- i) There is a tension in secular education between deductive and inductive processes of learning. Some feel that the commitment to experiential learning has been at the expense of content.
- ii) Mature age students - such as would participate in Discipleship Education bring life experiences to the learning process and that needs to be recognised and used.
- iii) The key to the process in adult education is the facilitator. Too much facilitation and the person dominates the group. Too little and the group can flounder. The skill is to help facilitators to know how much and when to act.

#### 4.4 Peter Bentley's key point:-

"Experiential learning based in small groups, with a trained facilitator and integrated resources provides a way to help people to move to a responsible faith."

#### 4.5 Resources.

Dealing with resources requires attention to both people resources and materials.

- i) A major emphasis appears to be using people as resources through consultancy.



- ii) Programs developed through consultancy recognise the local situation.
- iii) It is important to equip both men and women with this skill.
- iv) As family life is a major entry point for sharing the Gospel and discipleship education it may need some special attention.

#### 4.6 Courses and Programs

Peter Bentley noted he had seen many courses but chose to refer particularly to three.

i) **Discipleship Training - South Moreton Presbytery, Queensland Synod.**

This course usually led by the Presbytery Chairman, the Rev Bryan Gilmour, with help from others, involves - learning sessions on personal formation, leadership, evangelism, social justice, biblical knowledge and theology. The course lasts for at least six months involving at least one night a week and two weekends. The weekends in a conference centre are particularly important for personal growth. The people participating take responsibility for each other - helping each other to the successful completion of the course.

Another feature is serving in the second three months as an "apprentice" to someone in the church whose gifts in a particular area are recognised. There is no doubt that this is one of the most exciting forms of discipleship development but it requires very competent leadership and is not easy to replicate.

ii) **Education for Ministry (EFM). General Board of Religious Education, Anglican Church.**

This course which comes originally from the USA is offered nationally in Australia. It is designed to provide participants with a theological

background based on reflection. **The Reading Strand** takes people through the Bible in two years, Church History in the third year and a thematic account in the fourth year. During the four years current issues are brought in relation to the biblical-historical material. The Reading Strand is discussed in the **seminar group** where a person equipped as a mentor provides particular assistance to individuals and to the group as a whole. A process of theological reflection is used to enable people to relate their feelings from their personal experience to culture and tradition. The times of sharing stories and the reflective framework are powerful elements. The course requires a long term commitment.

- iii) **Masterlife - a program developed by the Southern Baptist Church in the USA and used by the Baptist Church in Australia.**

The focus of this program is discipleship through biblical teaching, practical exercises and spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible study. There is a very strong emphasis on evangelism and seeing a close correlation between evangelism and discipleship. The course is based in the community and a strong dimension is group members helping each other. There are also manuals for less literate people who work through the same issues but with more simply written materials.

#### 4.7 Factors which stand out as important:

- i) For leaders and facilitators.
  - trained in group dynamics and communication skills
  - trained in experiential learning techniques
  - skills in facilitation - able to direct people to self learning and autonomy
  - able to be role models, "discipleship as demonstrating", mentor models, trusted direction peer models, others can try too.

ii) For parishes and congregations

- the parish "owning" the groups doing the course
- creating a climate for learning
- financial and personal support
- people aware that they are being equipped to serve in the church and community.

iii) For people attending courses

- short courses of 5 to 12 weeks
- flexible approach and modules for longer courses
- recognition by the local church of peoples' effort and through the presentation of a certificate
- contracts - commitment to the group, oneself and the process
- the establishment of goals
- being released from other church programs to give this a priority
- the development of gifts
- reasonably comfortable learning facilities
- the use of a personal journal as part of the learning process
- the importance of prayer as a way of support
- the value of field experience in adult learning
- a time for reflection and quietness as part of learning.

iv) For the preparation of Resources

- there is still an important role for books
- manuals seem particularly helpful but are expensive to produce
- there is value in books which tell stories
- the needs of "non-book" people have to be considered
- study guides would be a good addition for some books and would help people read the book effectively rather than being "overcome" by it.
- there is still a place for speakers and preacher if they are seen to have integrity and can communicate well.

- there is a role for audio cassettes provided there is good quality production.
- the use of the visuals in learning is growing in importance.
- good quality video cassettes are attractive though expensive to produce.
- some secular resources can be used with good effect.
- the potential of computers has still to be explored.

#### 4.8 Motivation to participate in Learning Programs

This section draws significantly on the thesis of Rev Arthur Pearce - *Motivation Within Adult Religious Education* (1982, GU).

- people are more likely to start and continue in Adult Learning if they are growth motivated rather than deficiency motivated. Deficiency motivated people may be dependent and wanting to become more so. They may have a fear of ignorance which motivates them. Christians are called to "grow up into Christ" which is a growth motivated vision.
- many adults had painful learning experiences in childhood or adolescence. This can be transformed through patience, gentleness and the development of trust.
- for those with a fear of ignorance simple serendipity studies and experiences can lead them to a new approach to learning.
- the biggest challenge is the challenge to change and the whole process should help in this.
- strategies for recruitment are essential and should be carefully planned.

#### 4.9 Factors in On-going and Other Motivation Factors

- inductive learning - helping people to make their own discoveries and to build on their experience.
- providing feedback during a course and evaluation at the end.
- having a follow-up strategy based on both the individual and the group.

- having a sense of development in terms of difficulty continually, and variety in the courses that are offered.
- the provision of a supportive structure in the life of the church for discipleship education and other adult learning.
- use life situation issues as occasions for adult learning.
- recognizing the particular potential of senior adults to participate.
- there needs to be a significant link between adult education and the learning program for children and young people.

## 5. The Proposal

5.1 Discipleship education is essential in the life of a church where the people feel called by the Holy Spirit to move *Forward Together* in obedience to Christ and in the service of God in the world.

### 5.2 The Vision

To encourage steadily increasing numbers of Uniting Church people to undertake discipleship education so that they:-

*know their faith  
grow in their faith  
live their faith  
share their faith*

### 5.3 The objectives of Discipleship Education

- i) to enable people to understand the great biblical themes that are fundamental to the faith.
- ii) to enable people to understand the nature of the Uniting Church through its historical background and theological beliefs as expressed in the Basis of Union.
- iii) to enable people to grow in their faith through Christian knowledge, devotional practice and other experiences that enrich and enliven faith.

- iv) to enable people to grow in their relationships so that they have self esteem, are willing to accept others, are developing greater self awareness and are more able to relate to other people.
- v) to enable people to draw on their life experiences and to identify God at work in those experiences as part of their development of faith.
- vi) to enable people to live their faith in their home situation, their community setting, their daily employment or involvement and in their various life situations.
- vii) to enable people to share their faith with other people with sensitivity and with confidence.
- viii) to enable people to receive love, insight and understanding from other people for their mutual benefit.
- ix) to enable people to facilitate the learning experience in themselves and other people in settings which they find attractive and through processes which they find helpful.

#### 5.4 A Basis for Discipleship Education

Whilst not mandatory it would be appropriate to see **Kerygina: the Bible in Depth** or the **Bethel Bible Study Program** as basic background for Christian people willing to participate in Discipleship Education.

The Uniting Church participates in Kerygina International through the Joint Board of Christian Education and has therefore a link to that organization including influence on how the program develops and on what resources will be available. It is recognised however that the Bethel Bible Study program has also been used with effectiveness in many Uniting Church congregations.

#### 5.5. Subject Themes

- i) The work of Peter Bentley and the interviews conducted by John Mavor in the Synods indicate the following are important topics for Discipleship Education Resources. The list is not exhaustive but is a starting point. These are topics, not catchy titles:

People and Their Loneliness  
 A Quality Marriage Relationship  
 Parents and Growing Children  
 Single People Facing Life  
 Transientness - People Moving From One Community to Another  
 How to Share Your Faith With Another Person  
 Witnessing for Christ Where You Work  
 Developing Self-Esteem  
 The Plight of People in Permanent Poverty  
 Avoiding the Occult  
 Using Spiritual Gifts  
 Helping People in the Church Who Are Not Willing To Name Their Own Pain in Life and Faith  
 Coping with the Experience of Bereavement and Loss  
 Learning to - Reduce Consumption; Re-use where we can and re-cycle where we can't.

- ii) The National Mission and Evangelism Committee in November 1989 said that the most immediate need for them was the production of two resources for adults and young people who had become newly Christian. One resource would be for people who had a background in the Christian faith and the other would be for those who did not.
- iii) As part of the initiative to produce materials that relate to a range of media it is proposed that a set of study guides identifying issues of faith be prepared on well known videos such as "Chariots of Fire," "S"torm Boy, "Steel Magnolias."

## 5.6 The Initial Resources in Summary

- i) A Resource for Newly Christian People (with a background in the faith)
- ii) A Resource for Newly Christian People (with no background in the faith)
- iii) Helping People Face Loneliness
- iv) Growing Up Together - A Family Guide
- vi) Living For Jesus: a) In A Classroom  
b) In an Office  
c) In a Hospital
- vii) Sharing My Faith With Someone Else
- viii) A Series of Study Guides on Ten Popular Videos.

### 5.7 Models of Learning

- i) A whole range of models will be used. The subject under consideration and the situations where the material will be used are factors in determining the methodology to be followed.
- ii) The models which would be appropriate include:-
  - individual learning
  - guided individual study (apprenticeship)
  - learning partners
  - a group with a facilitator
  - a group with a mentor
- iii) For example, "A Resource for Newly Christian People" may be a resource to be used individually. The material on "Helping People Face Loneliness" may be best for group study with a facilitator. The resource on "A Quality Marriage Relationship" could be planned for a couple to work through together.
- iv) Whilst experimental and inductive learning helps people to face the fear of change more effectively and recognises the individual's ability to contribute to the learning experience, it would be best to have a range of educational methodologies in the resources that are prepared. Some courses would be inductive, others deductive. Some would use the question



and answer method. Others would be based on action reflection. There is no one way that is the only way to undertake adult education.

#### 5.8 Preparing the Resources

- i) Specific outlines for each resource to be produced need to be prepared by the person handling editorial responsibility.
- ii) These would be commented upon and further developed by the Co-ordinating group.
- iii) The actual writing would be done by small groups working in a similar way to the groups who prepare the Joint Board Living Faith Resources for young people and children.

#### 5.9 Other Learning Programs

- i) It is important to recognise that Discipleship Education Resources are only part of the plethora of adult education opportunities that are available in the church.
- ii) A growing number of people are undertaking studies for the Lay Preachers' Exams. Some of these lay people may in fact never preach but they have used the Lay Preachers' Exam as an opportunity to learn more about the faith.
- iii) The Ministerial Education Committee of the Assembly has asked several members to develop a proposal in relation to Theological Education by Extension. Drs. Rob Bos and Don Carrington have prepared a most interesting concept which could see many more Uniting Church people engage in significant theological study in the years ahead.

#### 5.10 Regional Learning Centres

- i) Adult Education has been discussed a lot in the church but the practice of it has been limited. The Uniting Church will only use the Discipleship Education Resources with new energy if a new vision is given. Such a vision could well be the

establishment of a series of Regional Learning Centres.

- ii) What is envisaged is the establishment of at least one of these centres in every presbytery across the nation. Learning Centres have been set up before. But the aim here is more than 50 Regional Learning Centres established by the co-operative effort of the congregation and parish; the Presbyteries, the Synods and the Assembly. If any one of the four sectors is missing then the vision as outlined is not being fulfilled. Each sector can bring a dimension to the Regional Learning Centres. All the dimensions are needed.
- iii) The congregation or parish offers its property to be used as the Centre and is willing to use some of its resources to develop an attractive learning environment with the necessary facilities and equipment. For example a carpeted meeting room is needed with lounge chairs and tables and chairs and with an overhead projector, public address system and facilities for making tea and coffee.
- iv) The Presbytery works with the Synod and the Parishes to determine where the Regional Learning Centre should be located. In some cases it may be preferable to locate it in a neutral location rather than in one church property. The Presbytery is asked to provide the money for the library of books, tapes, videos and materials for courses that would be located at the Centre. The Presbytery would recruit the people who would use their gifts by working as volunteers at the Centre. The Presbytery would also help to motivate the people so the Centre was well used. Where a Lay Training Centre already existed within the bounds of a Presbytery it is hoped that institution would also become the Regional Learning Centre for the Presbytery.
- v) The Synods who were able to do so would through the staff members involved in Christian

Education, Mission and Evangelism provide a major part of the training opportunities at the Regional Learning Centres. People from the local Presbytery or other Presbyteries or the community may well be involved also. The vision is that these Regional Learning Centres would provide a new impetus for adult learning - a much needed impetus in the life of the church.

If Synod staff are going to be involved in an increased amount of training then it will help if that can be focussed in a particular location.

- vi) The task of the Assembly through the Joint Board of Christian Education and National Mission and Evangelism is to produce resources that will encourage discipleship education and which can be used at the Regional Learning Centres and elsewhere.
- vii) Not all Presbyteries may want to take this action. Because of demographic and other reasons the establishment of the Regional Learning Centre may not be helpful. But if we can achieve a national initiative and the development of property is matched by the preparation of resources and the equipping of people then we are moving in the right direction.
- viii) It may be that one of the ways ahead is to initiate some pilot projects where Regional Learning Centres are established and some preliminary courses are trialed.

## 6 Conclusion and Next Steps

This report is a preliminary one to make possible planning by this Committee for National Mission and Evangelism and the Joint Board of Christian Education.

If the general directions proposed are approved, the joint planning group will need to develop more precise action places including provision for consultation with synods and presbyteries about practical next steps.

The development of Discipleship Education Resources is only one part of *Forward Together*. It is however a specific activity that can lead to immense good in the life of the Church and the Community.

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1/5/90

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