

Uniting Church in Australia

Analysis of the
Responses to the Interim
Report on Sexuality

as prepared by Peter Bentley
for the Assembly Standing Committee

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1. INTRODUCTION

1A Review of responses

I was employed by the Assembly to provide a basic factual and statistical account based on the responses to the Interim Report on Sexuality (approximately 20 pages). Given the time frame I have followed a pattern of reading all responses under 3 pages (excepting the photocopied form letters) and all longer responses from the councils of the church. Individual responses entailing four or more pages I have quickly read through in order to determine the direction and emphasis and in the majority of responses under 10 pages I have read all of the response. I have recorded the longer responses separately.

1.2 Coding and Counting

1.2.1 Coding and duplication

I reviewed all the categories as coded by the Assembly (see the lists on page 3) and found the initial coding to be very helpful and straight forward. Due to the volume received in the week of the deadline to the responses there was a small amount of inaccurate coding. This has mainly occurred in the individual responses (eg. a congregation was coded to an individual response). This is why I have provided two figures, the initial Assembly final figure and the figure I have used to calculate information about the responses. I have also adjusted the responses for duplication. Duplication has occurred for two main reasons: responses have been faxed and mailed (often without indicating) and people have sent copies of their letter to other Synod and Assembly office bearers (mainly the Queensland Moderator and the President-elect), who then forwarded the response to the Assembly. In a few cases the same response was sent on behalf of a group or council by two people). Duplicates have been culled in nearly all cases. I am quite confident that there are no duplicates in the statistics representing the councils of the churches. It is possible that a small amount of duplication (probably less than 1% overall) remains in the individual responses, but this would have little effect on the overall picture.

Other responses not counted in the statistical analysis include: letters regarding process or matters of a general complaint. In the analysis of individual responses I have provided a further breakdown of responses:

- based on the summary of the Interim Report
- based on media reports/church media reports/indicated had not read report.
- based on Form Letters: I have endeavored to distinguish all form letters (including handwritten ones) and thus have included Form Letters as a separate category.

1.2.2 Number of Pages

I have attempted to calculate the average number of pages per response. In the case of handwritten responses this has meant estimating the size of the response as a typewritten page (A4).

1.3 Rating formats

1.3.1 Basic Categories

For groups and councils of the church I firstly recorded whether the response raised significant concerns about the report. For all responses able to be categorised I rated as negative, positive and/or mixed. Overall, people have viewed the report as a whole document to be affirmed or rejected as a whole, even when individual parts may be more strongly affirmed or more strongly rejected.

One person illustrates the negative view: "You built a beautiful house ... only to discover that this house would soon fall down because the plans were faulty ... the basic foundation has been omitted - the moral law founded on the Word of God."

Another person illustrates the positive view: "I affirm the whole report unreservedly... overall approach ... seems to me essentially correct."

Responses to the Interim Report on SOAuality

1.3.2 Rating on a scale from 1 - 6

1. Affirming of the direction of the report
2. Affirming of the direction of the report with minor reservation
3. Mixed response, but overall leaning to affirming of the report
4. Significant Affirmation of certain parts but overall rejection of the report
5. Strong Rejection of the report
6. Extremely strong rejection (to the point of leaving)

1.4 Comment on Processes adopted for responding to the Interim Report

It should be noted that a variety of ways were used to prepare for and facilitate responses to the Report, including small group work, individual study, parish and congregational based seminars (presenting different views. including the involvement of members of the Task Group). It is not possible to determine how each response was developed, though through the analysis of the categories I believe people will be able to gauge some idea of the extent of the work throughout the church. Certainly some responses show little evidence of having read the report (and I have attempted to note these separately), but there is also convincing evidence to point toward extensive study of, and use of the report and other resources by individuals, groups and members of the councils of the church.

Note: this certainly does not mean that every response followed a detailed study, but there is no doubt that the responses represent a substantial body in terms of the number of parishes and membership in the Uniting Church.

1.5 Length of response

I have provided a picture of the size of responses, but readers should not assume that short responses are insignificant. The response form encouraged short responses in a certain format. It is significant that the majority of groups/people chose not to follow this format, and/or added extra material. While it is obvious that the majority of negative responses are short (1-2 pages), it should be noted that a significant proportion of the very affirming responses were brief as well. Overall about (1100) 22% of the responses analysed were extended commentaries (i.e. 2-3 pages with comment on several aspects of the report). Another group of more extensive responses represents about 7% of the total group. The affirming proportion in these two groups of longer responses is 14% and 12% respectively.

Brief initial summary

This report will follow the format in which responses have been coded on receipt. This will include the councils of the church groups and individuals. Toward the end there will be an overview picture but for the purpose of a more complete picture I would recommend reading this report with two sections in mind: (a) councils of the church and (others (groups and individuals).

Assembly coded numbers - Total:	8035	Final Number:
Congregations	167	158
Councils of Elders	206	192 (176)*
Parishes	212	203
Presbyteries	30	26 (18)*
Synods	17	16*
Groups - Response	200	197 (173)*
Groups - Letter based	263	1-41
Petitions	27	28

Individuals - Responses	3087	2597 (+ 247)
Individuals - Letters	3826	1422 (98)*
		(+1323,467,194,38)

+ This indicates form letters and other groups not counted in overall analysis.
See the actual individual reports for these groups.

Note: the final numbers used in the overall analysis differ slightly from the above information on the right side because the end summary relies on responses which were categorised as affirming, or negative and does not include those in the 'other' category, as well as duplicates, responses to the summary/media and church media reports (reported separately), additional responses/attachments and in the case of the large group of Individual responses do not include form letters and form responses. A separate analysis of form letters is provided in the individual section. I have included a statistical note regarding form letters in the councils of the church (i.e. the percentage in each case), but due to the small number and the fact that these councils were the place of origin for the majority of the form response letters they have still been included as part of the general response for that group.

2. CONGREGATIONS

Assembly coded number of responses:	167
Duplicates/wrong codes/not counted:	13
Extra responses counted:	4
Final Number for this section:	158

2.1 Synod breakdown:

NSW: 26%; Queensland: 15%; South Australia: 30%; Victoria: 22% and WA: 5%; Tasmania: 3%.

2.2 Overall Summary

Of the 158 responses, five represented multiple congregations (an extra 8 congregations in total) and over 12% of congregations were related to another congregation through membership of the same parish. These were mainly in S.A. For further comment on this see the statistical table section after the parish statistics.

(Note: this group does not include congregational elder responses. They have been coded to the Council of Elders group).

66% of responses were brief 1 - 2 page comments. 30% provided additional comment and 5% extensive comment. The page range was 1 - 27 with an average of 2.5 pages per response. Approximately 10% of the responses were based on the wording of form letters/form responses and another 5% included an aspect of a form letter/response as a component in their response. 9 congregations from four parishes had similar or identical responses. e.g. three congregations in the one parish submitted a mostly identical response.

Overall 93% of the congregational responses raised particular concerns about the Report. In the category allocation this was:

89% were negative, and 11% either positive or mixed with leanings toward affirming. On the scale I have devised 91 % of responses fell into the 4, 5, 6 range with 75% receiving a 5. Approximately 9% of responses fell in the 1,2, 3 range. Of these positive or mixed responses 57% came from Victorian congregations. S.A. provided 33% of the negative responses.

2.3 Major areas of concern highlighted in the responses (total group)

Ordination of practising homosexuals: 67%

Endorsement of homosexuality: 62%

Scripture use: 50%

Smaller numbers mentioned concerns related to endorsement of pre-marital sexual relations (14%).

Overall I would estimate that about 91% of responses did not affirm the direction of report with regard to homosexuality. This is based on the 80% of direct references to homosexuality and 11 % indirect (this group totally

rejected the direction of the report or were opposed to the underlying scriptural and theological foundations which the report used to support its conclusions.

2.4 Affirming areas

37% of responses endorsed the seven word statement: Celibacy in Singleness and Faithfulness in Marriage (either for ministers, members or as the standard for the Uniting Church). The main areas affirmed include the sections on marriage and the elements of right relationships and Chapter Four. Most responses did not follow the suggested format.

About 35% of responses indicated general appreciation for the work of the Task Group and/or for the role of the Assembly in promoting the matter of sexuality. A similar percentage did not see any need to thank the Assembly and indeed went out of their way to mention their displeasure, most stating a need to see a total repudiation of the Report.

2.5 People Numbers

95 of the congregational responses indicated the number of people represented by the response. The groups ranged in size from 6 - 300. Total people: 3532. An average of 37 per response. (Note: presuming this average was consistent this would mean approximately 6000 people *could be* represented by the congregational responses).

Breaking down the individual count it was evident that the majority belonged to responses not in favour of the report: 95% to 5%. About 5% of the responses indicated that a vote had been taken to provide this information. Of the number who could vote (not counting those who were present but did not or were not able to vote) over 99% voted to approve the response.

3. COUNCILS OF ELDERS

Assembly coded number of responses:	206
Duplicates/wrong codes/not counted:	19
Extra responses counted:	5
Final Number for this section:	192
Number for most counts:	176

Note 1: I have included 16 responses in the overall picture (Synod breakdown) but not in the category position areas. While still being technically responses from Councils of Elders these responses did not provide comment on the report, rather they were mainly brief points of factual comment (indicating that the Council had decided not to make a decision and to allow individual elders to comment) or were calls for more time for discussion to allow for adequate debate.

Note 2: This section includes all the responses from councils of elders of the church including parish and congregational councils. Parish Councils of Elders represent 80% of this group.

Note 3: A further breakdown of parish and congregational responses based on Synods and outlining Parish links is provided at the end of this section.

3.1 Synod breakdown for Councils of Elders:

NSW: 36%; Queensland: 24%; South Australia: 11 %;-Victoria: 18% and WA: 8%; Northern/Tasmania: 3%.

3.2 Overall Summary

65% of responses were brief 1-2 page comments. 20% provided additional comment and 15% extensive comment. The page range was 1 - 10, with an average of 2.3 pages per response. Approximately 12% of the responses were based on the wording of form letters/form responses and another 6% included an aspect of a form letter/response as a component in their response.

Overall 87% of the responses raised particular concerns about the Report. In the category allocation this was:

84% negative and 16% either positive or mixed with leanings toward affirming. On the scale 1 - 6: 85% of responses fell into the 4, 5, 6 range with 73% receiving a 5. Approximately 15% of responses fell in the 1, 2, 3 range. Of these positive or mixed responses 65% came from Victorian councils of elders. NSW provided 39% of the negative responses, Queensland: 28% and Victoria: 19%.

3.3 Major areas of concern highlighted (total group of responses)

Ordination of practising homosexuals: 60%

Endorsement of homosexuality: 62%

Scripture use: 42%

Smaller numbers mentioned the matter of ceremonies for same-sex couples (30%).

Overall I would estimate that about 82% of this group of responses did not affirm the direction of report with regard to homosexuality. This is based on the 74% of direct references to (different aspects of) homosexuality and 8% indirect (this group totally rejected the direction of the report or opposed the report's underlying scriptural and theological foundations).

3.4 Affirming

41% of responses endorsed the seven word statement: Celibacy in Singleness and Faithfulness in Marriage (either for ministers, members or as the standard for the Uniting Church). In terms of affirmation 65% of responses chose not to follow the format and affirm sections of the report, 19% provided limited affirmation and 16% provided extended affirmation (note: the positive responses provided either limited or extended affirmation).

About 15% of responses indicated a general appreciation for the Task Group and the Assembly promoting the matter of sexuality.

3.5 Number of People

86 of the responses indicated the number of people represented by the response. The groups ranged in size from 6 - 30. Total people: 1117, an average of 13 people per response. (Note: *presuming this average was consistent this would mean approximately 2500 people could be represented by, the responses*).

On an individual basis over 90% belonged to groups not in favour of the direction of the report. Examining the responses which indicated that a vote had been taken to provide numerical information indicated that those in the minority groups were not statistically significant.

Examining the question about the preparation of a concise statement for the 1997 Assembly was again a difficult task but over 80% of responses were not in favour of a statement based on this report or prepared by the Task Group.

4. PARISHES AND PARISH COUNCILS

Assembly coded number of responses:	196 (Parishes)
Assembly coded number of responses:	16 (Parish Councils)
Duplicates/wrong codes/not-counted:	13
Extra responses counted:	4
Final Number for this section:	203

4.1 Synod breakdown

NSW: 31%; Northern: 1%; Queensland: 19%; South Australia: 15%; Victoria: 27%; WA: 4%; Tasmania: 2%.

4.2 Overall Summary

53% of responses were brief 1-2 page comments, 35% provided additional comment and 12% extensive comment. The page range was 1 - 17 with an average of 3 pages per response. Approximately 4% of the responses were based on the wording of form letters/form responses and another 6% included an aspect of a form letter/form response as a component in their response.

Overall 87% of the responses raised particular concerns about the Report. In the category allocation this became:

81 % negative and 19% either positive or mixed with leaning toward affirming. On the scale I have devised, 82% of responses fell into the 4, 5, 6 range, with 67% receiving a 5. Approximately 18% of responses fell in the 1,2, 3 range. Of these positive or mixed responses, 44% came from Victorian parishes (22% of the negative responses). NSW provided 27% of the positive responses and 32% of the negative responses.

4.3 Major areas of concern highlighted in the responses:

Ordination of homosexuals: 66%

Endorsement of homosexuality: 54%

Scripture use: 54%

Smaller numbers mentioned concerns related to same-sex ceremonies (40%) and endorsement of pre-marital sexual relations (20%).

Overall I would estimate that about 84% of parish responses did not affirm the direction of report with regard to homosexuality. This is based on the direct references to homosexuality and indirect (i.e, total rejection of the direction of the report or strong opposition to the underlying scriptural and theological foundations which the report used to support their case).

4.4 Affirming

47% of responses endorsed the seven word statement: Celibacy in Singleness and Faithfulness in Marriage (either for ministers, members or as the standard for the Uniting Church). The other main aspects affirmed included the sections on marriage and divorce (3%) and the elements of right relationships (12%) and parts of Chapter Four. The majority of responses did not follow the suggested format.

About 33% of responses indicated a general appreciation for the work of the Task Group and the Assembly promoting the matter of sexuality. About 24% expressed dissatisfaction with the Task Group and the Assembly.

4.5 Number of People

122 of the responses indicated the number of people represented by the response. The groups ranged in size from 6 - 500. Total people: 6838, an average of 56 per response. (note: *presuming this average was consistent this would mean approximately 11, 400 people could be represented by the responses*).

The majority of individuals noted/and or who signed agreement with the response belonged to responses not in favour of the report: 92% to 8%. Of responses indicating a vote, the substantial majority voted to approve their particular response. The negative voters represent about 1 % of the total group (already included above).

5. RESPONSES FROM CONGREGATIONS AND PARISHES -- SYNOD BASIS

5.1 Parish responses - numerical comparison

Please refer to the statistics in the following table. The statistics are based on 1994 statistical returns for the Uniting Church.

#1. Number of parishes in the Uniting Church and Synod and distribution as a percentage of the total number.

#2. Number of individual parishes who provided a response to the Report (as a Parish, Parish Council or Parish Elders). Note: parishes are included only once even if they submitted two responses.

Total number of individual parishes: 318 . (32% of Uniting Church parishes)

#3. Number of parishes where a parish or a congregation of a parish has responded without a separate parish response. This may provide a more accurate reflection of the wider parish impact, particularly because some congregational responses may actually be parish responses (ie. single congregation parishes which have responded as a congregation).

Total number of parishes in this group: 436 (44% of the total number of parishes)

5.2 Congregations #4

4. Total response: 204 congregations (7% of total number of Uniting Church congregations 2921).

Note: this group includes local congregations and congregational councils of elders.

Table 1: Synod distribution for Parishes and Congregations

	NSW	North	QLD	SA	TAS	Vic	WA
#1	269 (27%)	22 (2%)	167 (17%)	117 (12%)	33 (3%)	309 (30%)	78 (8%)
(#2)	103 (38%)	5 (23%)	66 (40%)	38 (32%)	7 (21%)	81 (26%)	18 (23%)
(#3)	137 (51%)	same	88 (52%)	61 (52%)	10 (30%)	109 (35%)	26 (33%)
(#4)	53 (7%)		35 (7%)	58 (14%)	5 (5%)	40 (8%)	13 (6%)

5.3 Other notes

5.3.1 Number of Parishes which submitted two separate parish responses

(Parish and Parish Elders or Parish and Parish Council):

14 - (4% of individual parish total).

5.3.2 Number of parishes where a congregation of the Parish also responded

38 - (12% of the responding parishes)

Note: In SA 33 of the 58 responding congregations are found in 12 parishes (note, not all these parishes responded as well). 2 parishes had four congregations respond, 9 parishes 3, and 12 parishes two congregations.

6. PRESBYTERIES

Assembly coded number of responses: 30

Number of actual responses: 26

(Less additional responses from the same presbytery)

6.1 Synod Breakdown:

NSW: 8/14, Queensland: 5/9, S.A.: 3/7; Victoria: 9/13, W.A.: 1/5 This represents 54% of active presbyteries.

6.2 Overall Summary

Number of people. 12 Presbyteries recorded either voting or attendance figures. Two presbyteries held open meetings (one recorded two different votes - there being, no substantial difference). Total people: 727. Average of 60 per meeting. (Note: If this average was consistent this could mean approximately 1500

people). Of the 26 responses I have rated 18 (69%). I have classified 8 in the other category. These responses indicated that the Presbytery concerned was unable to provide more than a general summary without significant opinion or chose to comment on matters of process, rather than the report.

A variety of processes were used to provide a response:

General information/summary of views of small groups/comments in the Presbytery (7, including two not rated); Consensus (3), Survey/questionnaire summary (4), Mixed with voting (6).

Most responses were brief (54%), with the extended response group (30%). Overall, 8/18 did not affirm the direction of the report. The other ten gave limited affirmation, usually of a more general nature (i.e, without direct reference to the most highlighted aspects of the report). In rating 1 - 6, most received a 3 (44%) or a 5 (39%). Victorian Presbyteries made up two-thirds of the group in the 1-3 rating.

8/18 indicated a different perspective on homosexuality to that of the Report. 50% of the responses specifically endorsed the seven word statement "Celibacy in Singleness and Faithfulness in Marriage" as the standard for the church or its ministers. The need for more work in the Scriptural area was affirmed by 10/18. 6/18 specifically thanked the Assembly/ Task Group for the work or report of the Task Group. It is difficult to determine an opinion regarding the preparation of a statement. Possibly 9 presbyteries provided an answer to the question with 6/9 wanting some statement though this depended on the statement actually made.

7. SYNODS AND ASSEMBLY

Assembly coded number of responses: 17

Numbers for this analysis: 16

This group includes responses formulated at annual Synod meetings and also responses from Synod agencies and committees.

7.1 Synod meeting responses (9)

Four responses detail resolutions recorded at an annual Synod meeting.

Of the four the Queensland motions are the only ones that indicate a firm direction of stated policy. The Queensland Synod passed (by formal majority) motions affirming, the traditional stance of the church regarding sexual practice in celibacy and marriage and the practice of homosexuality. The other Synods, Victoria (recorded in two responses), WA and Tasmania provided a mixed range of responses, which are difficult to summarize in a categorical way.

Overall these three responses affirmed particular support for the principles of right relationships, gave general support to the report (particularly in the way that it addressed and raised contemporary issues for the church), and provided pointers to areas for future work which would enhance the debate.

Regarding the preparation of a statement, Victoria passed by formal majority a motion advising the Assembly "that clear statements on sexuality should be made at the Eighth Assembly". The Queensland response indicated that the Synod was "fairly evenly divided as to whether a statement should be prepared". WA concluded that it was not the appropriate time for a statement.

South Australia addressed the report at a Council of Synod meeting. It submitted a collation of responses from groups, noting that it was not possible to reach consensus on the report. A record of the notes and discussion of the report at the Northern Synod were also provided for the information of the Task Group.

The NSW Synod passed a motion (by formal majority) concerned with process, placing a request to the Assembly that decisions on the report not made by consensus be referred back to the other councils of the church. Victoria passed a similar motion (by formal majority) with reference to Clause 39 of the Constitution.

Both the NSW and WA Synods also provided reports of their 'children at Synod' discussions of the report or issues arising from it.

7.2 Agencies and committees (7)

- * NSW: Board of Education and the Board for Social Responsibility (BSR)
- * NT: Mission and Parish
- * SA: Social and Justice Unit and the Participation of Women Committee (2)
- * TAS: Social Responsibility
- * VIC: Doctrine and Liturgy Committee

All responses from Social Justice committees were strongly affirming of the direction of the report, while making some constructive criticisms for future reference, particularly the NSW BSR report. The Northern and Victorian committee reports provided a mixed review of matters, with the Victorian report raising a number of ethical and hermeneutical considerations. The NSW Board of Education response was primarily a critique of the methodological and stylistic base of the report.

7.3 Assembly Agencies

Three Assembly agencies provided a response. Briefly the Commission on Women and Men was an affirming response, the Commission on Doctrine a mixed response and the Commission for Christian Unity provided comment on areas related to its mandate. These responses have been included in the groups category for statistical analysis.

8. GROUPS

The following two categories represent groups of people usually associated with local churches who embarked on a joint study and then provided a joint response. The variety of groups is quite significant, including: UCFs (Adult Fellowships), Ladies Fellowships and Men's Groups, Adult Learning groups, Seniors, Youth and Young Adults (about 5% of the Letters group), Bible Study groups, Small Group Networks, Home Fellowships, All Age Groups, UCA - KYB groups (Know Your Bible), and a home church. Groups emerged as part of the parish process of responding, as well as independently of any parish process. Overall groups tended to be based around like-minded individuals and the small number of groups which recorded a vote is insignificant compared to the total number responding in these categories. A small number of non-Uniting church groups are included in this section, but for the purpose of the statistical analysis they are separately noted.

8.1 Groups - R - using response forms

This includes groups using the response form as the basis for a response (including additional material)

Assembly coded number of responses:	200
Duplicates/wrong codes/not counted:	10
Extra responses counted:	7
Final Number for this section:	197/173*

Note: I have further divided this group of 197.

24 'couples' - usually a married pair (male and female) were classified in this category but since most couples were originally coded to the Individual category I believe it is more accurate to separate them within this group. (Note: I have noted the extra numbers in the Individual category).

8.1.1 Synod breakdown (based on 197):

NSW: 28%. Queensland: 13%; South Australia: 18%; Victoria: 30%; WA; 8%. Tasmania: 10%.

8.1.2 Brief summary of 'couples': 24 responses. Average length of response 2 pages (response form and additional note). 87% raised concerns about the report and 87% have rated 5 on my scale of 1 - 6. Two of the 24 rated 1. The major concerns revolved around the report's perspective on homosexuality.

78% of responses were brief 1-2 page comments, 22% provided additional comment. The page range was 1 - 10, with an average of 2 pages per response (the response form and an additional note). Approximately 3% of the responses were based on the wording of form letters/form responses.

Overall 75% of the responses raised particular concerns about the Report. In the category allocation this was: 70% negative, and 20% positive and 10% mixed, mostly with positive leanings. On the scale I have devised. 71 % of responses fell into the 4, 5, 6 range, with 62% receiving a 5. Approximately 29% of responses fell in the 1, 2, 3 range. Of these positive or mixed responses, 50% came from Victoria and 16% from WA.

8.1.3 Major areas of concern highlighted in the responses (based on 173)

Ordination of practising homosexuals: 60%

Endorsement of homosexuality: 45%

Scripture use: 45%

Overall about 70% of responses indicated they did not agree with the general direction of report with regard to homosexuality.

8.1.4 Affirming

14% of responses were enthusiastically supportive of the Report's direction concerning' homosexuality. About 25% of responses indicated general appreciation for work of the Task Group and/or the Assembly regarding the report or promoting the discussion of sexuality.

8.1.5 Number of people

162 of the 173 responses indicated the number of people represented by the response. The group responses ranged in size from 3 - 140 (made up of different smaller groups). Total people: 2032, an average of 12 per response. Individual basis 75% negative - 25% positive.

8.2 Groups - L - Letter based

This category includes groups using a general letter/submission format (and usually did not include the response form). Included in this category are responses from Uniting Church based gay and lesbian groups (four), Assembly agencies, groups representing Evangelical Members (SA) and the Fellowship for Revival (Tasmania and Victoria), and 1 Lay Preachers' Association and a Uniting Church school.

A number of forms and petitions were included with these submissions (people signing agreement with the submission forwarded).

Assembly coded number of responses: 263

Duplicates/wrong codes/not counted: 22

Fmal Number for this section: 241

8.2.1 Synod breakdown

NSW: 30%. Queensland: 25%. South Australia: 16%. Victoria: 22%. WA: 4%. Northern/
Tasmania: 4%.

8.2.2 Overall Summary

57% of responses were brief 1-2 page continents. 30% provided additional comment and 13% extensive comment. The page range was 1. - 20 with an average of 3 pages per response. Approximately 4% of the responses used the wording, of form letters/form responses and another 4% included an aspect of a form letter/response as a component in their response.

Overall 77% of the responses raised particular concerns about the Report. In the basic category allocation Negative - Positive the breakdown was: 74% negative, 11% positive and 15% mixed with leanings toward

affirming. On the scale I have devised. 77% of responses fell into the 4.5,6 range, with 65% receiving a 5. Approximately 23% of responses fell in the 1,2,3 range. Of these positive or mixed responses. 43% came from Victorian congregations and 30% from NSW.

8.2.3 Major areas of concern highlighted in the responses (total group)

Ordination of practising homosexuals: 50%

Endorsement of homosexuality: 52%

Same-sex ceremonies: 36%

Overall I estimate that 76% of responses did not affirm the direction of report with regard to homosexuality. This is based on 66% direct references to aspects of homosexuality and 10% indirect (scriptural and theological foundations).

8.2.4 Affirmations

29% of responses endorsed the seven word statement: Celibacy in Singleness and Faithfulness in Marriage (either for ministers, members or as the standard for the Uniting Church).

About 27 % of responses indicated general appreciation for the work of the Task Group and/ or for the Assembly regarding the discussion of sexuality.

8.2.5 Number of people

186 (77%) of the 241 responses indicated the number of people represented by the response. The actual groups ranged in size from 3 - 35 (Note: I have not included a petition based group of 86 people as the largest size group, this group is included in the petition numbers). Total people recorded: 2212, an average of 12 per response. On an individual basis on the recorded numbers a clear majority belonged to responses not in favour of the report: 92% to 8%.

8.2.6 Three ethnic groups were represented. One was part of a Tongan petition and has been included in the overall petition category. The others, one from a Korean fellowship and an Ethiopian group were not supportive of the report.

8.2.7 Other responses not included in this analysis: a Baptist Church in WA (not supportive of the Report), the Protestant Church of Bali (comment on process), and Acceptance (Victoria) - Catholic based homosexual group (positive review).

9. PETITIONS

Assembly coded number of responses: 28 (including one from 8.2.6)

Note 1: A Variety of petitions were received but 99.9% were opposed to the main direction of the Interim Report on Sexuality. Common features were: rejection of the report/direction of the report regarding the endorsement of homosexuality ordination and the endorsement of the seven-word statement.

Note 2: this does not include names from signature sheets attached to some response forms and responses from councils of the church. The places mentioned do not necessarily mean that this is also the official congregational position on the report.

The following provides a brief summary of the range of petitions.

NSW: 5 petitions. Total: 212 signatures (Beverly Hills, Parkes, Belmont and South Cronulla)

Queensland: 8 petitions. Total: 631 signatures (Acacia Ridge, Calvary Carbrook. Fitzroy Nth Rockhampton, Ingham. Maroochy, Paradise Point Sunnybank)

Victoria: 5 petitions. Total: 355 signatures (Nyah. Leongatha. Lilydale. Melton. Narre Warren)

South Australia: 1 petition. Total: 11 signatures (Glenunisia)

Western Australia: 3 petitions. Total: 149 signatures (Albanv, Mt Barker)

Tongan Parishes in Victoria, NSW and Queensland: 7 petitions. including 1 from the group responses). Total: 687 signatures.

Also one general petition (transferred from the group category), based at Kandos. NSW - 86.

Total overall: 2131 signatures

Size Range: 7 - 411

10. INDIVIDUALS

10.1 Individuals - Coded R - Responses with response form

Assembly coded number of responses: 3087

Duplicates/not counted: 243

Form Responses/Letters (see separate analysis): 247

Number of responses for analysis: 2597

Note 1: Responses in this group typically used the response form for at least the base for their response. Responses were mainly brief and to the point but a number of extended responses were received. Because of the diversity of responses I have broken up the number into several different groups. While there is often overlap, e.g., homosexuality and the use of the bible, I have endeavoured to provide a breakdown based on the overall focus of the response. Individual responses tended to express stronger view points than groups and councils of the church.

Note 2: among the not counted are 32 "lost responses". These are missing numbers. It is possible that in the initial coding some numbering became out of order. The majority of the group 'not counted' are responses related to the summary/media reports or responses from individuals about process matters and general issues. Also included are responses from non-Uniting Church members including Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Church, past members and a submission from a member of Exodus (Victoria). Note: because I decided to exclude non-members from the statistical analysis this does not mean that I am making a judgement about the worth of each particular response.

Total group for analysis: 2597

Overall picture:

Affirming: 21% Negative: 79%

Detailed breakdown

10.1.1 Extended responses: 85

This group includes detailed theological critiques and reflective essays. 92% are not supportive of the direction of the report. On a rating scale: 82% recorded a 5. Of the positive responses the majority were critically affirming, but were much in favour of the theological direction and ethos of the report.

Synod breakdown: NSW: 29%, Queensland: 26%; S.A.: 16%. Victoria: 22%; Northern, Tasmania. WA: 6%.

Page range: 3 - 40. Average: 7 pages. 19 responses were 10 pages or more. 47% of the negative responses affirmed some aspect of the report and 20% overall specifically thanked or commended the church for the work. A similar percentage expressed significant displeasure with the task group and/or the report.

The report's underlying theology and use of scripture was a major point of concern: 62%. and over 90% were not in favour of the report's position on homosexuality.

1

10.1.2 General negative: 1237 %

NSW: 34%; Victoria: 27%; S.A.: 17%. Queensland: 15%, Tasmania: 1%; W.A.: 4% These responses are basically short comments/ answers to Questions 1 and 2 on the response form and include specific comment on two or more aspects of the report, usually homosexuality and the use of the bible. Other significant areas of comment: sexual relations before marriage, the theology and ethos of the report.

Further breakdown:

i) noting NO affirmation: 214

This group of responses specifically indicated that they could affirm "nothing" or "none" (Reference: Question 1 "Which chapters/paragraphs of the Interim Report do you wish to affirm?"). In response to Question 2 ("Which

chapters/paragraphs trouble you?"): they were usually troubled by "All" or "everything". 56% of this group of responses came from NSW and 31% from Victoria.

ii) no affirmation and extended rejection: 126

This group includes responses which contain more detailed negative comment

iii) no affirmation indicated: 253

This group includes responses which did not include any answer to Question 1 and only brief negative responses to Question 2.

iv) limited affirmation: 475

31% from Victoria and 28% from NSW. This group includes responses which answered Question 1 (noting affirming parts), but still overall indicated rejection, mainly on the areas of homosexuality and the use of the bible. The main areas affirmed: sections on marriage, right relationships (particularly 4.6), Chapter 2: 1-3, and the picture provided in Chapter 1.

v) Extended affirmation and rejection of report: 169

This group includes responses containing extended answers to Question 1 but reject the overall direction and foundation of the report.

10.1.3 Significant Focus on Homosexuality: 560

This group includes negative responses which concentrate on aspects of homosexuality as presented in the report. 40%: Victoria, 26% NSW.

i) Stated nothing to affirm and strongly opposed to direction re: homosexuality: 57

ii) No indication of affirmation: 181

iii) Limited affirmation and rejection because of direction re: homosexuality: 165

iv) Particular rejection only: ordination of practising homosexuals: 157

10.1.4 Focus on the Bible/Scripture: 170

Responses in this group concentrated on the authority and nature of the bible and the use of scripture in the report and the value respondents perceived to be placed on the bible/scripture by the Task Group. NSW: 39%. Victoria: 23% and Queensland: 15%

i) Stated "nothing: to affirm: 70

ii) No indication of affirmation: 63

iii) Limited affirmation: 37

10.1.5 Affirming responses: 545

NSW: 23%; Queensland: 11%, S.A.: 14%; Victoria: 40%; WA: 10%.

This group records a strong appreciation for the report and the work of the Task Group. For example, respondents found the report: "outstanding", "inspired", a "wonder revelation".

Another person stated that "The Interim Report is a beautiful shaft of light. Please do not let the darkness put it out."

i) *Short affirming*: 230 (42% of all affirming in this group)

These responses mainly affirmed "The Lot". and were troubled by "None". Usually a short thank you note or praising comment was included under Question 3.

Main Synod responses: Victoria: 44% and NSW: 18%.

ii) *Specific affirming*: 315

These responses, while affirming the report also included specific areas for affirmation and/or comment. Affirming without a critical element: 45%. Affirming with critical comment: 55%. This last group includes a small number with reservations about some aspects of homosexuality, but who expressed an overall positive attitude to the direction of the report and/or openness to change their view. The major areas of reservation include: the church blessing same-sex relationships; ordination of practising homosexuals (in particular "too soon" to introduce this), and the use of the word 'libido' in the report (3.19).

Two comments illustrate this group: "The report, for me, opened up a broader perspective than I had previously employed." and "It has been a time of growth in the light of the opportunity to struggle with the questions raised by the Interim Report."

10.1.6 Form Letters/Responses (R group)

I separated a group of 247 responses which were usually photocopied response forms with the response already filled in. People then attached their name and address. These response forms including affirming parts but ultimately rejection of the report. This group represents 8% of the coded R category. Of the 247, approximately 57% came from S.A. and of this group over 65% used a format emanating from County Jervois S.A. Other areas to record over 5% in this group: Shellharbour and Young in NSW; Boonah in Queensland and Geraldton in WA.

10.2 Individuals - Coded L: Responses - letters/submissions

This was the largest coded category and includes the largest variety of responses opposed to the direction of the report (from detailed academic papers to vitriolic accounts and direct abuse of the Task Group members). It should be noted that the majority of responses are simply records of very strongly stated opinion, in the main very opposed to the direction and theological foundation of the report. I have endeavoured to break the total into several groups, with separate comment.

Note: form letters are not included in the statistical analysis for responses to the report. I have chosen to include these as responses to issues raised by the report.

Assembly coded number of responses:	3826 (including early letters)
Duplicates/not counted:	221
Anonymous/no address/illegible (not counted):	161
Form Letters/responses (see separate analysis):	1323
Protest letters (see separate analysis):	467
Summary/media responses (see comment):	194
Miscellaneous/non-members (see comment)	38

Numbers of responses for this analysis:

L1 - 1324

L2 - 98

10.2.1 Responses – L1 (1324)

10.2.1.1

Extensive responses: 146 (11%)

Main Synod responses: NSW: 30%; Victoria: 24%, Queensland: 19%.

This group contains responses from 4 - 54 pages (2 responses from Queensland both 54 pages). 9 responses were over 20 pages (including two with additional supporting papers). The average length was 9 pages. There were also two extensive anonymous responses (not included).

Overall, 120 (86%) of these responses did not affirm the report, 9% were very affirmative. often urging the Task Group/Church to develop their direction further (though also 90% provided extensive usually "friendly" critical comment about the report, particularly its methodological and hermeneutical base) and 5% mixed with leanings to affirming.

The negative responses ranged from lengthy sentence by sentence critiques with personal stories and testimonies (including healing ministries), to extensive specialised academic papers - types: theological, biblical, philosophical, methodological, sociological reflections, medical aspects (particularly male homosexual practices) and scientific and genetic studies.

10.2.1.2 Other responses: Overall negative: 1034 (not including the 120 above)

i) *Extended comment (no affirmation):* 343 (26%).

These responses (the equivalent of 1 - 4 typewritten pages) included more detailed critiques of the report and several issues.

Queensland: 29%, NSW: 23% and Victoria: 23% -

ii) *Short responses (no affirmation):* 463 (35%)

These responses focussed mainly on the two or more areas (as referred to in the report) including homosexuality, the authority of the bible and pre-marital sexual practice).

NSW: 31%, Queensland: 30%; Victoria: 19%; S.A.: 14%.

iii) *Short responses - homosexuality:* 128 (10%)

These responses focused on opposition to one or more aspects of the report's direction concerning homosexuality, especially ordination matters.

Victoria: 34% NSW: 27%; Queensland: 22%.

iv) *Limited affirmation. but overall rejection:* 100 (8%)

These responses essentially followed the response sheet format affirming certain areas but rejection overall of the main conclusions and direction of the report.

NSW: 30%; Victoria: 15%

10.2.1.3 Affirming responses (including mixed): 144 (11%)

The majority of affirming responses were brief 1-2 pages letters endorsing the direction of the report and/or major aspects (ordination of homosexual persons).

Most responses came from Victoria: 47% and NSW: 24%.

28 (20%) of this group had some reservations about aspects of homosexuality in the report (mainly the celebration of same-sex relationships), but were either "open to the view" or supportive of the overall position of the report (the issue was more 'my problem' than the report).

10.2.2 L2 - Other responses: 98

i) *Miscellaneous letters:* 45

This includes general complaints about an aspect of the church (and small reference to sexuality), sample questions for surveys/referendum about aspects of the sexuality debate, opinions/claims made about other responses, process (including 'more time needed'), general testimonies etc.

Specialised areas: 16

This category includes extended comment on issues rarely mentioned without clearly indicating a position on the overall report including:
the place of widows, masturbation, castration, sex change, sexual incapacitation, disability and sexuality, natural law, the authority of the Basis of Union, editorial style and layout, ideological considerations and a school view.

iii) Mixed 37

This includes those who do not believe the church should provide any rules (leave things alone), do not believe in judging **other** people or their lifestyles, expressed the view that we should just wait and **let** time sort things out. etc. Overall this group would probably lean toward the affirmative.

10.2.3 Total number of people L1 and L2

(including letters signed by two or more): 1660 **Negative:** 85% **Affirming:** 11%

10.2.4 Other responses - miscellaneous and non-members: 38

(**Note:** Not counted in above analysis)

Individual Non-members ie., indicating not a member): 18 (including 5 based on the summary - three affirming (Jewish person, Metropolitan Community Church. gender worker) and two not affirming (Jehovah Witness, visiting USA professor).

ii) Other churches represented: Anglican, Baptist, Churches of Christ, Pentecostal (AOG and CRC), Primitive Methodist Forum. In this group were two specialist academic papers on aspects of **the report**, particularly homosexuality (biblical and medical).

iii) Other areas: offers of help from people involved in gender/meditation **centre, chemical/ medical areas, prayers for the church**, various bible passages (probably **as a negative** response), **poems** and allegories/stories, dreams and visions (3) and the benefits of nudism (1),

10.2.5 Responses to issues raised by the report

10.2.5.1 Form Letters - 1215

Form letters followed a general pattern of rejection of the report and/or specific issues, notably the practice of homosexuality as 'a legitimate lifestyle for Christians, the ordination of practising homosexuals and the blessings of same-sex unions, as well as the affirmation of celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage as the standard for Christians or at least the church's ministers. The overwhelming majority of form letters were one page in length, but the range was 1 - 8 pages (form/paper type responses). The majority of letters came from two synods:

i) Queensland: 62% (35% of these from four areas: Shailer Park, Maroochy, Rochedale and Springwood). Note: approximately 3% of the Queensland letters came from teachers/parents at a Uniting Church Christian school. Some indicated they were UCA members but the majority did not state their church membership).

ii) SA: 20% (40% of **these** came from three areas: Keith, Ardrossan and Jamestown)

10.2.5.2 Survey forms/questionnaires: 108

Though smaller numbers are included in the above form letter group, two major groups were received: 46 (Findon, SA) and 62 (mainly Central Coast NSW).

While this material contained a variety of questions it was evident that 80% were strongly opposed to major aspects of the report. 15% less strongly opposed and 5% mixed.

10.15.3 Protest Letters: 467

I have included a category (similar to form letters) for responses to certain issues raised by the report or the report itself. Basically this includes letters from people who wish to record their protest to the church

endorsing an aspect of the report or who wish to record their general opposition to the report/discussion of the matter.

Focus on Homosexuality practising homosexuals/ordination): 320

Focus on the use of the bible/theology (and homosexuality): 147

10.2.5.4 Number of people associated with form responses/letters: approximately 2000

10.2.6 Notes re: other categories

10.2.6.1 Duplicates/not counted

This includes copies of letters (ie., same letter to Task Group, then President. President-elect, Synod Secretary or Moderator - these copies were usually forwarded to the Assembly office), responses with the wrong codes and missing responses (2).

10.2.6.2 No Names/addresses

31% anonymous/illegible (88% negative); 50% name, but no address (91% negative); 18% form letter of either type.

11. Ethnic component of responses

Note: these responses were included in the relevant category for the purpose of analysis, but are reported here for an overall picture.

A small number of responses were received from ethnic parishes/congregations within the Uniting Church - 5 in total. A Chinese Parish, Macedonian, Samoan, and Korean congregations and one Korean church coordinating body. All these responses were quite critical of the report and the perceived direction on sexual matters, especially homosexuality. Three responses were received from people working within multicultural/migrant-ethnic areas. None of these indicated that migrant-ethnic groups were affirming of the report. One person commented that in his experience there was an "attitude of indifference and even hostility to this report from Asian and Pacific people". Another worker commented that the report was seen as a "European document", which could not be affirmed because you then "conceded to the whole report". He concluded that the ethnic churches could not accept homosexual ministers and that there would be few ethnic congregations remaining if this matter was endorsed by the Assembly.

A small number of individual responses were noted (less than 10). including Ethiopian. Chinese. Indonesian and Aboriginal people) and group responses (already noted). These were not affirming of the direction of the report.

12. Responses from Minister of the church

Note: this section only provides basic information on ministers who provided individual responses (i.e, this does not include ministers who sent in parish/congregation responses). This group includes Ministers of the Word and Deacons (all Deacon responses were affirming of the report), and Lay Pastors.

12.1 Number. 335. *Male: 303 (90%) - Female: 32 (10%)*

12.2 Synod breakdown: NSW: 26%. Queensland: 18%; South Australia: 18%; Tasmania and Northern: 3%; Victoria: 27%. Western Australia: 7%.

12.3 Overall view of report:

Negative. 66%. Positive: 23%. Mixed. 5%;

Other (forwarding responses. general information and comments about how the attitudes of their parish members): 5%

12.3.1 S Synod comparison on negative responses:

NSW: 74%; Qld: 70%; Sth Australia: 80%; Victoria: 48%, Western Australia: 50%.

12.3.2 Synod comparison on positive responses:

NSW: 15%. Qld: 18%. Sth Australia: 13%; Victoria: 38%; Western Australia: 46%.

12.4 Gender analysis - *Negative*: Male: 70% - Female: 19%
Positive: Male: 18% - Female: 69%

13. Relation to Parish involvement in the Year of Listening

114 parishes are noted as respondents to the Year of Listening in *Occasional Paper No. 9* (page 9). Of this number the Synod breakdown was: Victoria: 48%, NSW: 15%, S.A: 16% and Queensland: 12%. (Also, it should be noted that not all of the 114 were actually parishes, a few were probably congregations).

Overall approximately 46% of the 114 Y.O.L. involved parishes responded to the Interim Report, the largest group coming from Victoria (17), but NSW (10), Queensland (19), Tasmania (4/5) and South Australia (8) all had larger proportional responses.

There were also responses from areas/groups associated with parishes involved in the Year of Listening and a number of scattered comments about the Year of Listening throughout the individual responses. but due to time and the diversity of the responses it was not possible to quantify these in any meaningful way.

14. Response Form Questions

Given the length of time for this initial study it has not been possible to do a detailed analysis of the response based on Questions 1 and 2 (Affirmations and Troubled By).

I believe that it would take approximately six months to provide a comprehensive guide. The difficulty lies in the structure of the request. It is not a simple task of data entry but requires detailed examination of the context of each response. I have already noted that a significant group did use this format for their response. Another major complicating factor is that many respondents who actually used the basic structure then developed it to a stricter degree, including sections and even sentences/words within the paragraphs (for example, affirming only those parts of the report which were verses from the Bible).

The following comments are based on limited analysis of response format answers from Councils of Elders and R - Individual responses.

14.1 Question 1: Re: Affirming paragraphs or chapters.

Overall, if people affirmed the direction of the report they affirmed the whole report enthusiastically. One person commented "Thank you for a very enlightening report". Another, "When I read the Report I felt enormously proud to be a member of the Uniting Church.". and another "As a comprehensive survey of a large and complex topic we think the Report has done a great job."

Specifically affirmed (major focus): the inclusiveness, social justice elements and compassionate base of the report, Chapter Four and the principles of right relationships, and in direct or indirect ways, endorsement of the report's position on homosexuality, sexuality outside of marriage and the report's theological and biblical framework and understanding.

If people did not affirm the direction of the report (in terms of conclusions and directions it proposed), then specific areas that were prominently affirmed were: the sections on marriage, right relationships (Chapter Four in general). Chapter 1 (as a helpful analysis), some paragraphs in Chapter 2 (notably 2: 1. 2. 3), parts of Chapter 3 (eg., 3.9, and 3. 10), other parts of Chapter 5 (eg., 1,2, 13, 55 - 59) and 6.14.

14.2 Question 2: Re: Troubling paragraphs or chapters.

Affirming responses generally found little of trouble in the report, but there was minor reservation about some aspects of homosexuality (usually related to the impact on the wider church or their own need to develop in understanding), and paragraph 3.19.

The majority of negative responses were strongly opposing, illustrated by this person's perception: "Because the report is itself a partisan report, taking one view very strongly, it must accept the right of responses to be partisan and speak mainly on one side as well."

Negative responses to the report found either the whole report "troubling", or features which undergirded the report, for example while many affirmed Chapter 4, especially 4.6, they did not affirm it as the basis for the church. One person commented "The information regarding right relationships is good and helpful, but not all relationships are permissible, no matter how good, right and just they seem." A significant group of responses could not affirm any of the report because of the way they viewed the report as a whole structure and indicated this (see the individual breakdown), or they just did not mention any sections that they could affirm, but concentrated on those that troubled. There is no doubt that the focus for the majority of 'troubled' responses was homosexuality, particularly the endorsement of a homosexual lifestyle for Christians and the ordination of practising homosexuals but underlying their specific objections were broader concerns related to the biblical and theological foundations of the Report.

While some negative responses commended the Task Group Report or the Assembly, the majority did not. One person commented "While I applaud the brave attempt to tackle this subject I am very disappointed that the Uniting Church could put their name to the resulting document."

Other specific areas include: the theology and method undergirding the report, Chapter I if used as the base for the church's understanding of sexuality within contemporary society, the whole nature, authority and use of the bible and particular hermeneutical questions (focussed on Chapter 2), parts of Chapter 3 (again especially 3.19). There is no doubt that the Task Group would now be well aware of the origin of the word 'libido' (3.16). Chapter 5 and 6 contains the major areas of specific concern, notably related to the sections on bisexuality, homosexuality (especially ordination of practising homosexuals, focussed on 6.8) and sexual relations outside of marriage ((for adolescents (5.1 1). single people (5.14), People Living Together (eg., 5.2.1).

14.3 Question 3

Given the diversity of response to this question it is difficult to quantify any answer. Overall it was an opportunity for people to either praise the Task Group and the Assembly Standing Committee or to take up an issue with them (or condemn one or both of the bodies).

14.4 Question 4 (Re: the preparation of a concise statement for 1997)

More than 20 different types of responses were received to this question. Some were difficult to include in a category eg., "perhaps", "maybe". "possibly" etc.

There are several main groupings, including a basic yes or no, but there were also significant qualifying remarks for the majority of replies to this question. Overall there more 'Nos' than 'Yes' (approximately two-thirds to one-third). There were also larger numbers in specific No categories including:

- No - and were not in favour of anything which was associated with the report
- No - people in favour of the report, but did not believe it was appropriate at this time.
- No - to the Task Group - specific mention that the Task Group should not prepare a statement.
- No - call for a referendum on the ordination of practising homosexuals
- NO or Yes, but then refer back to other councils of the church

Other Yes categories included:

Yes - but not just yet.

Yes - as long as it confirms what I have said in my response.

Yes - as long as it is based on the responses.

Yes - if the statement confirms traditional church teachings eg. celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage.

Yes - a statement reflecting the diversity of the church.

Yes - continue the work of the Task Group, but not a divisive statement.

Overall I have concluded that the majority of people do not want a statement to be made based on the report.

15. Overall Summary

Note: There may be a slight difference in the overall number due to the transfer of some responses to different categories in the main response group.

15.1 Number of responses used in main analysis and able to be categorized (not including 'others which were not given a rating', form letters and petitions): 4919 (61% of all responses - note approximately 2% not rated). Of this 61 %:

Overall Picture: Negative: 82% (4014)

NSW: 30%; Queensland: 20%; S.A.: 16'7c: Tasmania: 2'7c: Victoria: 25%; W.A.: 59'c

Overall Picture: Affirming: 18% (905)

NSW: 21%; Queensland: 9%; S.A.: 10%; Tasmania: 1%; Victoria: 40%- W.A.: 8% (Northern Synod less than 1% combined).

15.2 Comparisons

15.2.1 Percentage of actual parishes - Percentage of parish responses

It is helpful to compare the above statistics with the parish statistics for the Uniting Church as a whole. On a parish basis the largest Synod is

Victoria: 30% of the total number of parishes - 25% of parish responses to the report

NSW: 27% - 32%

Queensland: 17% - 21 %

SA: 12% - 12%

WA.: 8% - 6%

Tasmania: 3% - 2%

Northern Synod: 2% - 2%.

These figures can also be compared to the percentage of responses on a Synod by Synod basis (see Table 1).

15.2.2 Comparison with actual Confirmed Membership

It may also be helpful to compare the Synod sizes in terms of membership percentages (again I have used 1994 figures, though I have provide an additional estimate for NSW because of the large proportion of parishes (39%) which did not send in a statistical return).

Actual Membership numbers: Synod percentage breakdown in terms of actual confirmed membership.

NSW: 30%; Northern: less than 1%; Queensland: 15%; S.A.: 14%; Tasmania: 2%; Victoria: 34%; W.A.: 5%

15.2.3 Synod comparison on negative distribution of responses

Returning to the responses. it is also worth comparing the negative percentage of responses on a Synod basis (note the national average was 82%).

NSW: 86%; Queensland: 90%; S.A.: 87%; Tas.: 88%; Victoria: 74%; W.A.: 75%

15.2 Number of responses not counted:

(including duplicates, no names/no address or contact. wrong codes, missing)

742 (9% of total responses)

15.3 Number of responses coded as responses to issues raised by the report (this includes form letters. protest letters and petitions): 2259 (28% of responses)

15.4 Number of People

15.4.1 Total people count including petitions and form letters but excluding categories normally not counted (duplicates, non-members etc): approximately 21 000

Of this number. Affirming of the report: 12% Negative: 88%

Note: this number would include some duplication ie.. people who responded as individuals and also as members of a council of the church or a group. It is difficult to estimate how much this may be.

15.4.2 Number not including form letters and petitions: approximately 16 000

Of this number.

Affirming of the report: 16% Negative: 84%

15.4.3 Number of people associated with the responses.

This is difficult to quantify, but I estimate that it could be over 30 000. This is based on making the following allowance for groups and councils which did not indicate the number of people associated with their response): approximately 10,000 additional people, as well as taking the actual membership statistics based on Synod distribution of parishes into account.

If the actual number of parishes is taken as a base and is related to membership figures throughout the Synods, then the figure could be much higher, approximately 100 000 (based on the total membership of the Uniting Church or 40 000 if only the confirmed membership is considered). Whatever the actual number I believe that there would be few people in the Uniting Church who haven't heard of the report or some of the issues arising from it. In comparison with other Assembly reports (particularly with other reports released during 1996) the Interim Report on Sexuality has facilitated more response and discussion than any other in the history of the Uniting Church.

Peter Bentley
for the Assembly Standing Committee
Uniting Church in Australia
27 February 1997