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ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Sure Footing

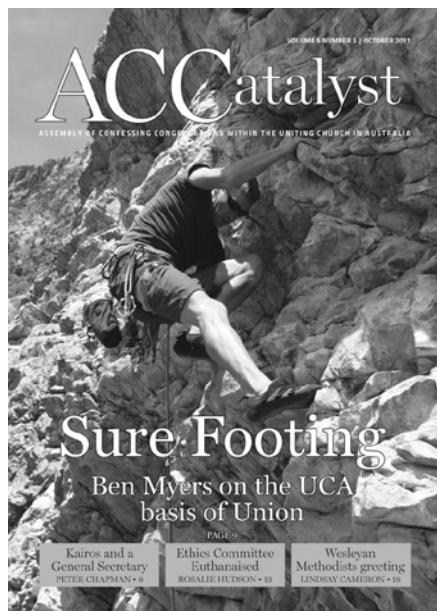
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EDITORIAL

Reasons to be cheerful

Some readers were upset that we did a cover story on the Hedley Fihaki situation last edition. For some, it was a matter of saying that an administrative fight in the UCA was not worth a cover. For some others the fact that we ran a fairly plain coverage without putting an ACC point of view was troublesome—but as far as I am aware ACC has made no official comment on the case.

From my perspective, I was just putting the facts before our readers—Hedley after all is the Vice Chair of ACC. Which makes the story newsworthy, for you lot anyway.

But cover worthy? A moot point I think. Now this time Ben Myers' essay on reasons to stay in the UCA is classic ACCat cover material don't you think. Safe ground for me.

John Sandeman

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The Reptile House

I have been having trouble with pests at my house. Not the manse - the only pests at the manse are earwigs, blowflies and my cat. I'm talking about my little house at Wongyarra, which is standing empty and silent most of the week. I usually spend one night a week over there and I have found myself dealing with pests.

First it was mice, and I got busy with rat poison. One mouse ate a bellyful of poison, then crawled into my bed and died there. That gave me a surprise and the smell lingered long after the mouse was gone and the bedding washed.

Then, last Wednesday I arrived home and sat down in the kitchen to eat some lunch. I was startled by a noise, and there behind me on the floor was a brown snake! I was not impressed. I won't tell you what I did with the snake, but I'll guarantee it will never come back again.

Because of the snake incident, when I went home a week later I was feeling a bit jumpy. I saw no snakes inside or out but I noticed a funny smell coming from my toilet. I looked in the door and noticed some unusual looking lumps of poo on the



Hilary Sandeman

floor, and there in the corner was a large sleepy lizard solemnly looking up at me.

I explained to it that while I was all for sleepy lizards I did not think it belonged in my toilet and I think the lizard agreed. I think it was quite glad to be returned outdoors to the warm sunshine after the cold concrete floor.

I then went into my spare bedroom and out of the corner of my eye I noticed a thin dark creature moving quickly across the floor. I nearly hit the roof. It was just a harmless droptail lizard, but I had reached my limit. "This is not a reptile house!" I yelled at it. The lizard ignored me and continued about its business.

The moral of this story is that if a

house has no people in it, it will very quickly be taken over by other creatures - some nasty, some stinky and some just plain undesirable inside a house.

Our lives are a bit like a house. God desires to come and live in us and shape us and form us to be the people he wants us to be, but we have the choice. We can let God come and live in us or we can choose not to. Maybe we prefer to just let God come and *visit us now and then, providing he doesn't start changing things around in us.* When God is in residence, he keeps the house safe from evil. But if God is not living in us, our lives will become filled with all sorts of other things. We are at risk of falling into addictions, bad habits, and worshipping false idols.

Paul says in Romans 8:5-6 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

I know which I want!!!

Robyn



Stu Cameron addresses the ACC conference 2011

ACC: Encouragement and hope

The Future of Evangelism – ACC Conference 2011

The annual conference for the Assembly of Confessing Congregations was held September 8-10 2011. It is hard to believe this was our fifth conference, and that we were back in Melbourne, being warmly hosted by the Waverley ACC Cluster. Members provided a wonderful example of Christian service and hospitality, including an abundance of sweet treats to complement the hired catering. The location at Brimbank Anglican Church Centre proved to be an excellent facility, especially for the worship times, and we were provided with full access and use during the time including a dedicated prayer room for the ACC prayer network.

As well as receiving our annual reports for the Council, Boards and Commissions (a summary will be available in the magazine, and when the 2011 minutes are approved, a combined volume will be made available to members), many proposals were considered on areas of significance within the UCA at the present time, including marriage and responses to the sacred union liturgy that has been promoted by another group in the UCA.

The new statement from the Social Responsibility Commission, A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide was received, along with the new DVD from the Discipleship and Evangelism Commission, 'The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth' (including a study guide). This is a

series that discusses the resurrection, the fulfillment of all things in Christ; the sure hope we have. All ACC member congregations, clusters and groups will receive a copy of the new DVD and study guide.

Copies of ACC statements are available from the ACC office – see the ACC website: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/>.

The AGM re-appointed the following members to the Council for the term 2011-2012.

Chair: Rev. Dr Max Champion (Vic)
Deputy Chair: Rev. Dr Hedley Fihaki (Qld)

Secretary: Rev. Walter Abetz (Tas)

Council Members: Fatai Tau-paleulu; Revd Anne Hibbard, Revd Peter Davis (NSW); Rev. Rod James, Robyn Painter, Rev. Derek Schiller (SA); Dr Colin Adam; Rev. Dr Ian Breward (Vic); Rev. Shane Kammermann (Qld)

The conference was addressed by three excellent speakers on some timely matters.

On Thursday night Dr Benjamin Myers spoke on 'The Basis of Union – An Evangelical Manifesto. In an eloquent and sometimes lateral excursion, Ben outlined how The Basis of Union is a manifesto for evangelism and a help for Christian community today. Ben gave a masterly outline of the Christological foundation of the Basis, drawing on Davis McCaughey's influence, and showing how central for our future as Christians is God's revelation in Scripture. 'He reminded us that the Gospel is a word of hope for humanity. Chris-

tians therefore should not be taken in by misleading presentations of the Gospel. Nor should they be dismayed by signs of decline in the church but look for opportunities to share the Gospel with others.'

On Friday morning Dr Mark Durie spoke on the broad theme of 'Evangelism and Islam.' Mark is a well-known commentator in the area of Islam and author of *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* and provided another sterling overview of Islam and many contemporary issues, including a comprehensive answer to the statement that is sometimes posited in liberal theology today, namely that 'we all worship the same God.'

The Friday Night rally was blessed to have Rev Stu Cameron former General Secretary in SA Synod and now Lead Minister at Robina, Queensland speak on "Confident Humility". Stu gave a word of encouragement; especially highlighting how being the local church can provide opportunities for connections that lead to people being surprised by God.

From the feedback received, the ACC conference is developing a wider fellowship among some of the regular attenders who maintain contact. It also provides a key time to support and encourage local members, especially those in more remote areas, or congregations that are liberal in the theological outlook.

Next year: Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide 13-15 September. Put the date in your diary now.



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PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

Dignity for Refugees

Public policy on asylum seekers is complex. Many issues have to be considered – compassion for people fleeing tyranny, discouraging traffickers in human misery, the rights of penniless refugees who remain in squalid camps, how best to assess claims.

One issue is simple. Desperate people, the vast majority of whom are genuine refugees, must be treated humanely. Having been kicked around in their own countries they must not be used as political footballs in ours.

The scaremongering of the Labor and Coalition parties about 'border protection' is a disgrace. Indeed, the exploitation of fear for short-term political gain hides the fact that Australia welcomes a large number of refugees each year. It also ignores the work done by thousands of volunteers to support refugees as they adapt to a vastly different culture.

The strong statement issued by President Alistair Macrae on behalf of the UCA on 19 September is, therefore, most welcome. "The Uniting Church's strong belief that God calls on us to welcome strangers, care for those in need and treat everyone with the dignity they deserve as children of God, is the basis for our support for human rights. It is critical for the continued development of peace and justice in the world that countries like Australia set the highest standard when it comes to upholding the rights of vulnerable people.

"We are shocked at the amendments that have been proposed in order to circumvent the High Court decision on the Government's ar-

rangement with Malaysia. Australia's reputation as a country which supports human rights and is always willing to help people in need is now under grave threat.

"Today we are writing to the Labor caucus urging them to reject these proposed amendments.

"Instead of a commitment to increasingly transparent and accountable government, we are witnessing a shift to less accountable government. No government minister should ever be able to make life and death decisions without being subject to the scrutiny of the parliament, the courts and the people of Australia."

Marriage Rights

In "*Marriage is about rights of the children*" (*The Age* September 5) Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, Associate Professor at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, reported on a marriage declaration endorsed by more than 50 national leaders of Christian churches. It supports "marriage as a legal institution that promotes and protects the identity of children and their internationally recognised right to know, to have access to and to be nurtured by both their mother and father.

"This is not a debate about the worth to the community of same-sex unions. The social values such couples exhibit in their daily lives are indistinguishable from those of their neighbours..." Nor is this a debate about equality and non-discrimination. The federal law in Australia has already been changed to give same-sex partners the same legal rights as those who are married, and in most states

the right to register their unions.

"The remaining issue, therefore, is the definition of marriage, and the question is why society has an interest in continuing to secure marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman."

Revising the definition of marriage has been presented simply as a justice issue of non-inclusion. There has been little in the media about the fact that this would mean revising what marriage means, so that it would be about romance only and no longer focused on establishing a relationship in which children are nurtured by both their mother and father.

If marriage were redefined, the law would teach that marriage is fundamentally about adults' emotional unions, about romance only, not complementary bodily union or generating and nurturing children.

In the debate over same-sex 'marriage' leading up to the UCA Assembly 2012, it is to be hoped that the case for marriage as the biological and social union between a man, a woman and their children is firmly and unashamedly upheld.

On being Christian

The following letter, edited for *AC-Catalyst*, appeared in the August *Crosslight*, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania paper. Rev Dr Brian Edgar, Prof of Theological Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, USA and former convenor of ACC Social Responsibility Commission, was contributing to a long running debate about Christian belief and ordination.

He identified "the problems with the way that the word 'Christian' has

been evacuated of meaning by those who deny the divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the resurrection of the dead and the existence of God." He said that because "it is difficult for anyone to claim ownership of a word like 'Christian' there will always be those who claim it while denying the meaning that it has overwhelmingly had since the beginning of the Christian church.

"The situation ought to be a little more straightforward when asking what is involved in being an ordained minister of the Uniting Church, because the meaning of that is spelled out in contemporary language and thought-forms and in documentary forms that are very familiar to us (including legal and constitutional documents, worship services and ordination vows).

"These cannot be dismissed as a foreign mythology from a former time. The problem is not that people believe different things (this is a pluralist society), but that people openly deny the ordination vows (expressed in plain English) concerning Christ as Saviour of the world and God as Trinity while continuing to claim the titles, positions, responsibilities and benefits that are rightly for those who affirm and teach these things. The appropriateness and integrity of this has to be raised.

"An even more serious problem is that the denomination has deteriorated to the point where it is completely unable to do anything about it. We may recall the Synod's response to Dr Macnab's 'old heresy in the guise of new faith' (as it was described by Dr Dorothy Lee, formerly a professor at the Uniting Church Theological Hall but now an Anglican) which began with a bang of criticism but ended with a whimper declaring that nothing was to be done.

"One positive option for those who hold to such traditional beliefs as God as Father, Son and Spirit and Jesus as Lord and Saviour is to see the orthodoxy of the church expressed in the Basis of Union (to which ordained ministers are to adhere). When looked at in this way, the Uniting Church is seen to remain a part of the wider catholic church. The alternative is to believe that actual practice is an important indicator of belief (something that has good precedent in the teaching of Jesus). In this case, the willingness of the church to encourage ministers who do not believe to continue in ministry is a demonstration of a loss of orthodoxy and catholicity. Orthodoxy that is purely

personal preference is not orthodoxy.

"One consequence of this attitude is that it is getting difficult to recognise the Uniting Church as part of the wider catholic church. It is perhaps then with no surprise (although with great regret) to hear of another theologian resigning from the UCA, that is, Dr Gordon Watson, formerly of the Victorian Synod, but latterly Head of Systematic Theology at Trinity College in Brisbane and, significantly, former Chairperson of the National Assembly Commission on Doctrine. He does not see the UCA as currently being 'a recognisable part of the one, holy, catholic church in the Reformed tradition'.

"The church will continue to bleed and weaken as long as the church continues theologically with an 'anything goes' attitude."

R.E. in schools

Nationwide concerns about the teaching of Christian education have surfaced recently. In Victoria, ACCESS ministries is authorised to provide training for teachers in primary schools. It recently came under fire when leaders expressed the desire to reach out to children with the gospel of Christ. The issue was debated at the recent Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. The following is adapted from a report by Barney Zwartz in *The Age* on September 21.

"THE Uniting Church, one of the key partners in Access Ministries has backed away from supporting the beleaguered agency. The Synod declined to vote on a proposal that the church continue to support the work of Access, instead forming a task group to explore the relationship between it and the Synod.

"It was the liveliest and longest discussion of the Synod. Annette Blaze, a Uniting Church representative on the Access board [and an ACC member] proposed that the Synod support Access, suggesting the ministry was victim of a campaign to attack the Christian base of Australia's culture.

But Synod opted for a proposal by Macedon Ranges minister Avril Hannah-Jones to investigate the Access curriculum. "There have been complaints. Some, clearly from the secular and new atheist perspective, I thought we could discount, but some came from parents and Uniting Church volunteers which I thought were worth exploring," Dr Hannah-Jones told *The Age* last night. She said the law was very clear that there must be no proselytising.

It is to be hoped that the "investigation" is not undertaken in a climate of suspicion. Important issues do need to be addressed. But it would be a pity if, in order to conform to "Uniting Church values" it was thought necessary to diminish the enthusiasm of teachers in telling the remarkable story of God's dealings with humanity in Christ.

Without a prayer

Edgewater Primary School, in Perth's north, has banned students from reciting the Lord's Prayer before assembly (AAP September 20). It ended the 25-year practice after some parents complained that it contravened the WA Education Act, which stipulates schools cannot favour one religion over another.

Principal Julie Tombs said "We acknowledge that of the parents who did respond to the survey, many wanted to retain the Lord's Prayer and it is right that we continue to recite it at culturally appropriate times such as Christmas and Easter, as part of our educational program. ...

"However, at this school we have students from a range of backgrounds and it is important to consider all views and not promote one set of religious beliefs and practices over another."

WA Premier Colin Barnett said, "My own view is that WA is basically a Christian-based community and I think it's desirable to have the Lord's Prayer said (but) that decision rests at the school level."

It is not a simple matter to "not favour one religion over another". Three issues arise.

First, the exclusion of one tradition inevitably means the acceptance of others. The decision assumes either that the prayers of all members of the school community are permissible at assemblies, or none. Neutrality is impossible.

Second, will the same question be asked of the teaching of Aboriginal religion in our schools? The laudable inclusion of indigenous stories in the curriculum is usually accompanied by an uncritical appraisal of primal religion and the critical exclusion of Christianity.

Third, it is another sign of the breakdown of the Judeo-Christian foundation of Australian culture. Christians are being confronted with a new and urgent question, unthinkable a few decades ago. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Lutherans and the UCA: “Mutual Recognition”

Dear Max,
RE: “Serious discussions”, (August 2011 *ACCatalyst*)

I am a member of the Lutheran Church – Uniting Church dialogue. Following comments in the July and August issues of *ACCatalyst*, I think it is important to make some clarification about the strength of that dialogue.

In the course of the last two years, the Lutheran and Uniting churches have both agreed on the adoption of a “Declaration of Mutual Recognition”. This declaration was adopted by the Lutheran Church on October 2009, and by the UCA Assembly Standing Committee in March 2010, following the direction of the 9th Assembly.

The declaration, which can be viewed in full at assembly.uca.org.au/unity/dialogues, affirms that we “participate already in the unity of the Spirit” and that we “desire to grow into and maintain this unity which is ours in Christ, in the bond of peace”.

It discusses our historical backgrounds, and affirms that which we hold in common.

The preamble was adopted with covering letters that include provisos for cooperating parishes, such as that a UCA minister providing pastoral and sacramental ministry to a Lutheran congregation must be male and not in a same-gender

relationship, and that an LCA pastor must be willing to work with and support women and men, both lay and ordained, as colleagues in their appointed ministry. All of this can be viewed at the same website.

In our present dialogue meetings, we are working on theological matters around how the two churches celebrate the Eucharist, given that Lutherans do not normally explicitly call on the presence of the Holy Spirit, and use the narrative with different significance. We hope to publish material on this in due course, particularly for the sake of cooperating congregations.

The dialogue has also had considerable discussion about the “critical issues of the day”, including the ways in which the churches approach texts regarding the place of women in ministry, and questions about sexuality.

The Lutheran dialogue team includes the Victorian District President of the Lutheran church and two professors from the Australian Lutheran College, among others, so I believe that it is taken seriously. It is a wonderful opportunity for us to continue to learn from and about each other.

The recent adoption of the Declaration of Mutual Recognition is testament to that.

*Rev David Fotheringham
Ashburton, Victoria*

The view from the ACC

Dear David,

Thank you for drawing our attention to the LCA-UCA dialogue document. The Ecumenical Commission’s report to the National Council of the ACC reads “March 2011, the one document where significant progress has been made,” referring to the Mutual Recognition document. Both churches understand themselves as “standing in continuity with the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church,” while noting the reservation concerning the UCA ministry.

The second document on the Interpretation of Scripture also captures our attention because it addressed the serious matter dividing the Church catholic—sexuality and faith—and how we do our work of interpretation. It is easy to understand why Dr Gordon Watson resigned from the UCA and was, in turn, recognised by the LCA as a retired pastor. As well as his substantial contribution to the dialogue over the years, he would be very much in agreement with the affirmations of the LCA—namely, that Scripture is the only source and norm of doctrine; Christ and the gospel are the heart of Scripture; unclear or obscure passages must be interpreted in the light of clear passages (“Scrip-



ture interprets Scripture’); the Bible teaching on marriage is an essential component of God’s creation; and the rule of faith and church tradition are crucial means by which gaps in exegesis may be filled.

In its Charter, Statement on Sexuality and Confessing Statement, the ACC has affirmed the unambiguous witness of Scripture to our creation as male and female in the image of God and our union in marriage as male and female. Therefore, we are disturbed by the eisegetical approach of the UCA in interpreting the key texts. For example, there is no justification to argue in 4.1 that Paul’s clear and unambiguous opposition to homosexuality, which he inextricably links to the problem of idolatry, could be re-interpreted to apply only to promiscuous people. It is the unnaturalness of the relationship itself that contradicts our creation in the image of God.

We are attracted to the LCA pastoral statement which is a ministry of grace to all.

Apart from the casuistic approach to exegesis we are dismayed to find assumptions that have long been discredited by studies in physiology, psychology and sociology. While the causes of homosexuality are complex, there is no evidence that it is ‘hardwired.’ The neuro-plasticity of the brain, the tendency of our sexual drives to be misdirected, the effect of social encounters and the place of choice are important factors, as is the scientifically verifiable fact that thousands of people, whose homosexuality seemed to be ingrained, have dramatically changed their behaviour.

We are attracted to the LCA pastoral statement that is a ministry of grace to all. However, for the sake of continuing good relations between the UCA and the LCA, and the ecumenical standing of the UCA, we urge you to correct the misrepresentation of the ACC for “not accept-

ing practising homosexuals even in committed relationships”. As this is a publicly available document, it is important that our sister churches know that a confessing movement within the UCA seeks to maintain the faith and unity of the church catholic.

We hope that the final quote from the document on interpretation,

that “the UCA is still working on these issues, and the present position should be seen as a stage rather than a conclusion” leads to a deeper understanding, not a further misunderstanding, of Scripture.

Rev Dr Alan Crawford, Convenor of ACC’s Ecumenical Commission, and former Moderator of the Synod of Victoria

IAN CLARKSON

All over the world

The great apologists like Augustine boldly argued the superiority of Christianity, that it alone produced the best earthly society. We should revive that method today with confidence and gracious assertion!

“The Christian conception of God has provided the foundation for what became an unprecedented type of human society” writes one historian¹ on Western democracy. Its possibility essentially comes from individuals having a personal relationship with God, spread through societies in the great movements of Christian reform and revival.

Secularists arguing against public policies and governance based on belief as irrational, or when they ironically flirt with Islamic sharia that has produced no examples of any desirable society or political system, are let off the hook too easily! Informed folk can and should counter clearly and factually. For their sakes and for the well being of our continually developing society, as well as for the honour of the name of our Lord.

The Gospel of Christ however is bearing fruit and growing. This is the news in every generation. This is the real history, His-story!

All around the world the minds and hearts of millions are coming under the rule of the Prince of Peace. The testimony to Christ is more persuasive, attractive and socially effective than any other religion or belief system

Becoming one people out of all peoples, one nation across all nations, we who have received Jesus

are with all His people in all generations and all places.

Jesus is our life and leader - we are under his governance. He who shoulders the rule of the universe². He is establishing a new nation whose people will be at peace with each other forever, the ones whom He has promised shall participate in the first Resurrection³.

Even now this new nation is a demonstration of the new creation, evidencing that Christ, to whom they belong, is raised from the dead⁴!

They need no earthly parliaments, courts or police to control them, or to make them do what is right or fair. Their laws are higher. They are willingly ruled by the invisible God.

They are benefactors to society, not a burden to it. Not one dollar of the billions we must all pay for crime, is incurred by them. They have no need of more laws to restrain or train them, benefiting only and properly from the protection afforded from them

We who belong to this people of God, enjoy His wisdom and eye of love upon us. We know Him and are known by Him before whom nothing can be hidden.

He sees our secret actions, and knows our motivations and thoughts. His purifying love has dealt with the darkness in our hearts and it will take us to maturity with our elder brother, Jesus, the first of this new race!

¹ L. Siedentop ‘Democracy in Europe’ p.194

² Isaiah Chpt.9

³ Revelation Chpt.20

⁴ John 17:23

Responding to the Gen Sec

General Secretary's Newsletter: June 2011 (NSW & ACT Synod)

To Church Council Secretaries, Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Lay Pastors, Youth Workers, School Principals, Presbyteries, Boards, Candidates

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15)

Our church is at a kairos moment; a brief window of opportunity, possibly only a few years at the most, in which to turn the church around, or to be more accurate "to repent and believe". To repent is another way of saying we need to face reality and change decisively. To believe is another way of saying we must trust God and risk all.

I believe that we are standing at the edge of Pentecost and that growth and change are possible. According to Orlando Costas there are four features:

- "numerical" growth
- "organic" growth where the organisation and structure becomes fluid and flexible enough to take account of the Church's context and the movement of the Spirit,
- "conceptual" growth. If there is no theological, emotional and spiritual development then despite numerical increase, the church is not growing, 'incarnational' growth. ..

At a meeting recently I was asked something along the lines of "don't we need a vision first to know where we are going?" I respond with three thoughts.

First, you can't, and shouldn't, worry about vision and long term transformation when the house is burning down! Vision is important, but as John Kotter, the Harvard Business School change management expert points out, vision is the third step in the process to getting lasting change. First comes creating a sense of urgency and second getting a guiding team together. Only when these things are in place can we begin to develop a strategy for how we can move forward. We need to have people realise that we

are at stage one – creating a sense of urgency. There are still many people who seem to think everything is okay in the church!

Second, there are several meanings to the word vision. The one we are most familiar with and the one we tend to think of first is "foresight" – the future oriented capacity to perceive what is not. Foresight means being able to look responsibly into the future and to describe changes that would be faithful to the purpose and the call of the church.

Vision is also perception—the capacity to perceive realistically what is present. The ability to see, and to help others to see, the way things actually are. We require both senses of vision. ...

Third, we have spent a great deal of energy on trying to produce "vision statements" and plans to change the church and re-structure parts of the Synod. In my view though there is little evidence that all that work has produced lasting results. ... Now I want to see some action and some change!

We stand on the edge of sparkling possibilities, but the time is short and we need to cast our nets on the other side. We must change direction, act decisively and risk all.

That is what repentance and faith are all about. Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news".

*Andrew Williams June 2011
(Edited for length by ACCatalyst)*

All hands on deck!

When I read Andrew's piece calling for decisive change and a turning around of the church, my reaction was: "Wow! Real, honest, visionary, risky, challenging leadership from a senior UCA officer—the age of wonders has not passed! Go Andrew! Bring it on!"

Together with a number of my colleagues who are charged with navigating a local ship of the UCA line, I have been very heartened by

Andrew's leadership thus far. He made time in the very early days of his new role to visit the rank and file locally, and seems genuinely interested in the 'views from the pews'.

Having been subjected for years to the UCA admiralty naively calling for more "inclusivity" and "diversity" as the guiding lights by which we might navigate the uncharted waters of the 21st century, Andrew's honesty and boldness is a breath of fresh air.

Perhaps most encouraging is Andrew's preparedness to name the fact that we are drifting dangerously close to the fatal reefs of irrelevancy and the deadly shoals of dysfunction. He appears to grasp the fact that we have been changing deck chairs on the Titanic for some time, and that a drastic change of course is long overdue.

The Bible verse that perfectly captures what I want to say to many high ranking officers in the UCA is found in Jeremiah: "My dear Daughter—my people—broken, shattered, and yet they put on Band-Aids, saying, "It's not so bad. You'll be just fine." "But things are not "just fine"! (6:14 & 8:11 MSG)

Andrew's call for a change of direction and a re-casting of the nets is one that I'm keen to embrace. My prayer is that this will happen not just structurally within our Church, but theologically as well. At their core, the woes of the UCA are theological. We have come adrift of our theological moorings and been drawn to the sirens' song of worldliness. Regrettable though it may be, I can understand why so many faithful crew members have jumped ship.

Despite much of the church being becalmed in the structural and theological doldrums, I will continue to contend for the gospel alongside Andrew on board the good ship HMS UCA. I believe he is correct in stating that this is a kairos moment, and that we stand on the edge of sparkling possibilities.

All hands on deck—repent and believe the good news!

*Rev. Peter Chapman
Gerrington Uniting Church*



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The Basis of Union: A Manifesto for evangelism

Benjamin Myers at the ACC National Conference

'All authority': Christ and evangelism

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.' (Matthew 28:18-20)

This text was the first biblical passage ever read in a Uniting Church worship service. At the service of inauguration in Sydney Town Hall on 22 June 1977, those words were read from the Gospel of Matthew, and then Davis McCaughey stood to preach the first Uniting Church sermon (the sermon

is reprinted in *Fresh Words and Deeds: The McCaughey Papers*). The sovereign authority of the risen Christ, and the universal scope of the church's witness: that was his double theme.

Because Christ is risen, he cannot be viewed merely as the founder of a religious sect, but as the inaugurator of a new humanity. He does not bring into being a specialised religious society: he overcomes the world and makes everything new. As McCaughey puts it: Christ does not say, "All authority has been given to me over the hearts and consciences of few"; nor does he say, "In the hidden places, among discreet groups, I may still be remembered and worshipped". Rather Christ says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me". To confess Christ as risen is not an expression of private devotion; it is a universal claim, a claim about reality, about the whole of history, about the secret truth of

every human life. If all authority has been handed to the risen crucified one, then all the world stands together under the light of Christ. There is nobody in history for whom Christ does not matter; no human monument that stands higher than his cross; no human desolation that reaches deeper than his descent into death; no authority that can outstrip him as he rises to God's right hand.

And so McCaughey's sermon takes up the flipside of Christ's authority: if all authority belongs to the risen one, then a call to make disciples follows almost automatically. Why should we go to all the nations? Because the risen one has authority over them all. Why should we make disciples and baptise? Because Christ has authority to call everyone to the way of discipleship. Why should we teach his commands? Because they are *his* commands – it is *his* voice that all people have to hear, *his* way that all should follow. The Great Commission, as it's often called, is really just an elaboration of the church's christology. The church's whole vocation, for St Matthew, is simply to live as though Christ were risen, to live as though all things are subject to Christ, as though his servant lordship is the real truth of history, truth for everyone in every place. In McCaughey's words:

For Matthew, a consequence of Christ being the risen crucified One is that all nations should be called to acknowledge him, [people] everywhere baptised into his Church, and taught the things that he has commanded. Note the repeated 'all', all authority, all nations, [people] everywhere, all his commandments. The universal mission of the Church is a necessary consequence of her central affirmation about Jesus Christ.

As soon as we confess that Christ is risen, we find ourselves compelled to bear witness and to make disciples. But in Australian society, McCaughey argues, this vocation is under threat. In our society, "the power of speech has been denigrated", "confidence in the spoken word has been eroded", and "inarticulateness is exalted as a virtue".

In response, McCaughey urges: "It is time for the Christian Church to remember again that faith comes by hearing". It is time for a counter-cultural recovery of the life-and-death importance of the spoken word.

This was an extraordinary sermon, an extraordinary thing for the Uniting Church to hear in its inaugural service. This same vision of the church is evoked in the opening paragraph of the *Basis of Union*: "in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church", the uniting churches pledge "to hear anew the commission of the risen Lord to make disciples of all nations". In 1977, the churches came into union not under their own banners, not under any human slogan or through any human initiative, but under those great words of commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore..." That is what union means. The Uniting Church is an evangelistic church.

It's because of the resurrection that the church speaks the gospel. It's because of the resurrection that the church isn't really a *proselytising* community, but an *evangelistic* community. The aim of evangelism isn't to get people to join a religious group, but to invite them



Barry M

As soon as we confess that Christ is risen, we find ourselves compelled to bear witness and to make disciples. But in Australian society, McCaughey argues, this vocation is under threat... In response, McCaughey urges: "It is time for the Christian Church to remember again that faith comes by hearing".

into personal confrontation with the living Lord of creation, the risen crucified one.

In New Testament terminology, a witness is simply someone who has seen the risen one. To see Christ as risen immediately produces an objective obligation, as well as a subjective compulsion, to *tell* about it. Christ's resurrection isn't the kind of thing you can observe from a safe, objective distance: to see Christ as risen is to find yourself questioned down to the roots of your being, judged and forgiven, blinded and healed, laid waste and redeemed, completely turned around and redirected. To see Christ as risen is to know him as God's own movement towards humanity; and this movement is then reiterated in our own lives, as we ourselves turn towards others with the gospel.

In paragraph 14, the *Basis of Union* says: "The Church lives by the power of the Word". We live by something that is addressed to us, a Word that is spoken from beyond ourselves. In the language of the reformation, God's Word comes to us *extra nos*—from outside ourselves. It's not something we can draw up from the wells

of our own spirituality; it's not something we can attain through our own efforts; it's not a Word that we could have ever told ourselves. This word-from-beyond is the theological heartbeat of the *Basis of Union*. We can call it 'revelation'—as long as we remember that we're not talking here about the communication of information about God; revelation means *God speaking in person*, God stepping on to our path and claiming our lives. Revelation simply means God—God speaking, God acting, God giving us God.

The 1959 document of the Joint Commission on Church Union, *The Faith of the Church*, was at pains to underscore this theme of revelation, and to tease out its implications for the whole life of the church. "There is a truth which has claimed us. We do not possess it; it possesses us." This means that every aspect of the church's life should be an act of faithfulness to something already said, a response to something already done, a following after the way of the Word. It also means that the church has no freedom to invent its own message. Ministers are not free to use the pulpit for their own interests, their own personal preferences, their own political agendas. Our message, the Joint Commission insists, must be "unequivocally conditioned by what God has said ... in Jesus Christ." God has already spoken—and the church's message is an echo of that great saving redeeming healing Word. Revelation creates an obligation and a responsibility. To belong to the church is to be responsible in two directions—responsible to the Word that has been spoken in Jesus Christ, and responsible to those for whom that Word is spoken.

Evangelism, then, is really just a fruit of revelation. Where the church loses its commitment to revelation, evangelism withers on the branch. If we forget that we have been addressed by a true Word, then we will neglect to pass on that Word to others. If we fail to hear God speaking, then we will also fail to respond. That's why Karl Barth once said: "A church which is not ... an evangelising church is either not yet or no longer the church, or only a dead church, itself standing in supreme need of renewal by evangelisation." If we no longer hear the Word, then we'll have nothing left to say.

Revitalising evangelism today

In the Uniting Church today, we need to recover a vision of the congregation as the site of diverse forms of public witness and ministry. The whole *laos* of the congregation should be taken up in the work of multi-faceted witness to Christ. But congregations need also to discern particular gifts of evangelism, to identify specific persons around whom the local witness to Christ can be concentrated. I think university chaplaincy is especially important here, as an evangelistic ministry rooted and nourished in the local congregation, and in turn nourishing and renewing the congregation with new disciples.

Evangelistic gifts also need to be recognised and nurtured among others—writers, musicians, graphic designers, film-makers, artists. Evangelism isn't a bland repetition of a prefabricated message. True evangelism requires immense imaginative energy. To communicate the gospel to our world means bringing two very different stories—the story of Jesus and the story of our



And for my money, one of our greatest contemporary evangelists is the American novelist Marilyn Robinson, whose novel *Gilead* gives a compelling demonstration of what it *feels* like to be a believer, what it's like to be held and loved and blessed by a gracious God.

contemporary world—into a creative fusion. The evangelist shows that every human story is somehow an episode in the one great narrative of God's act in Christ. This is what Karl Barth was referring to when he said that every preacher should have a bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. In evangelistic communication, these two worlds come together in a fresh, compelling way.

I'm sure I don't need to remind you that some of the church's greatest evangelists have been writers. How many people have been led to faith by reading the *Confessions* of Augustine – a work that creatively narrates one human life-story as the story of divine grace? In the past century, how many people have said 'Yes' to God after reading authors like G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Thomas Merton? And for my money, one of our greatest contemporary evangelists is the American novelist Marilyn Robinson, whose novel *Gilead* gives a compelling demonstration of what it *feels* like to be a believer, what it's like to be held and loved and blessed by a gracious God.

Such gifts are, of course, rare and precious. I don't mean to suggest that every congregation will have evangelists of that order. But we could be doing a lot more to nurture and cultivate artistic, creative gifts in our local neighbourhoods. The church could be mobilising its resources not only around specified ministries, but also around people with gifts for creatively communicating a Christian vision to the wider culture. Where such activity is rooted in the worshipping life of local congregations, the congregation's witness can be focused and concentrated around these charisms, so that our own capacities for evangelism are revitalised.

And when we speak of evangelism, we're not just talking about the initial step of making converts, though this is crucial. For the New Testament communities, as William Abraham has argued in *The Logic of Evangelism*, it wasn't just about getting people to take the initial step of converting. Evangelism was a longer, slower process of initiation into the coming kingdom. To evangelise is to initiate people into a whole life of discipleship. Perhaps what's needed here is a recovery of the ancient tradition of evangelical catechesis—patient, systematic education in the communal beliefs and disciplines that arise from the gospel.

There are some exciting initiatives in this area. In NSW, I'm thinking especially of the School of Discipleship, which has been running for several years as a sort of Synod-wide catechumenate. In the School of Discipleship, university students gather annually for a few days of intensive biblical study, theological exploration, and reflection on how diverse professions and vocations—law, medicine, the creative arts, or whatever—can be carried out as Christian discipleship. And in Sydney, alongside the big annual event is another gathering called School of the Prophets: this is a Sunday afternoon seminar that meets several times a year for theological and biblical reflection. All this has arisen from the ministry of a couple of university chaplains who are committed to evangelism and to the worshipping life of local congregations. This kind of evangelism involves a deliberate process of apprenticeship in Christian discipleship. And in NSW, a number of ministry candidates in recent years have been coming out of this catechetical movement – which illustrates the way evangelism eventually flows back into the congregation, becoming a source of life and renewal.

Each congregation needs also to be nourished by the discipline of daily Bible reading and serious Bible study. This might seem too obvious to mention: but typically, evangelising congregations are Bible-reading congregations. The Joint Commission describes the church's posture in relation to holy scripture: "There is a given Word and it comes to us by means of words." Scripture is 'a given Word'—it's not something we make up, it's not something that we can decide for ourselves whether we'll take it or leave it. In paragraph 5, the *Basis of Union* says that the church "receives" the Old and New Testaments "as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony". The whole people of God learn to respond to God's work as they listen attentively to this unique testimony. Thus the Basis also identifies the cultivation of bible-reading as one of the basic tasks of Christian community: "The Uniting Church lays upon her members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures".

All this brings us back to the importance of revelation. We need constant exposure to holy scripture because it tells us something that we could never tell ourselves. Scripture is a testimony *extra nos*—it speaks to us from beyond ourselves. It calls us to attention. It confronts us with trustworthy testimony to the risen crucified one. In this way, the regular discipline of bible-reading helps to align us with the will of God, the work of God, the gracious turning of God towards our world. I don't mean that bible-reading works by magic: obviously there are plenty of bad ways of using scripture, especially when the bible is used to reinforce our own assumptions, our own prejudices and ideologies. Bonhoeffer once



We read scripture 'against ourselves' because it is not our word – it is the word of someone else, a word from God.

remarked that we need to read the bible 'against ourselves' – not as a confirmation of our own views, but as a challenge, a confrontation, an invitation to travel deeper into discipleship. We read scripture 'against ourselves' because it is not our word – it is the word of someone else, a word from God, a word that we always need to hear afresh.

Faithfulness

Finally, let me remind you that evangelism is, fundamentally, not a matter of method or strategy or technique. It is a matter of theology. The question of evangelism is really just the question of God: what kind of God do we believe in? What kind of God do we worship and confess?

On 22 June 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia gathered around the Word for the first time. And the voice of Jesus Christ rang out loud and clear: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples!' As McCaughey said in that first sermon, evangelism is necessary because the risen one has 'all authority'; and it is possible because he is with us, even to the end of the age. To be embarrassed of the spoken word – to be ashamed of the gospel – is a symptom of spiritual sickness. The health of the church, the renewal of the church, will be found in obedience to Christ's commission and faithfulness to Christ's promise.

What we really need isn't just to become more effective, but to become more faithful, more trusting, more responsive to the Word that God has spoken in Jesus Christ. If evangelistic witness has grown feeble in our churches, perhaps it's because of an impoverished christological imagination. Perhaps we have forgotten that the crucified one is risen and alive, possessing 'all authority', reaching out today into all the world – and giving us the joyous privilege of reaching out with him, speaking in his name, announcing his great promise to those whose hearts will leap with joy to hear such strange unheard-of tidings, such glad good news.

Dr Benjamin Myers is Lecturer in Systematic Theology United Theological College, Sydney

Ethics and 'grounded theology'

Rosalie Hudson on the demise of a bioethics committee

Following a review by the Victoria/Tasmania Synod Standing Committee the bioethics committee has been discontinued from 31st August 2011.

Three of the committee's members were ACC members: Rev Ross Carter (chair), Dr Rosalie Hudson (chair) and Dr Nell Muirden). In many years of service to the committee, these and some other members understood the task described in the committee's Terms of Reference.

'In the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia, the church acknowledges the Old and New Testaments as 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated' (Para 5). The Bioethics Committee understands that the witness set forth in the Scriptures is the framework that should inform all its discussions and reports. The aim of the committee in exploring contemporary matters of bioethics is to reflect theologically on these issues. In so doing, the committee's task is to help the church to reflect faithfully the truth given to us in Jesus Christ.'

The reviewers (appointed by the Synod Standing Committee) of the

committee's work were concerned that "the theological perspective of the current committee may not reflect the diversity of, or the views to be found within the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania."

Therefore, a new committee is to be formed by the Standing Committee, of members who "may need some theological in-service training to ensure that they understand the 'grounded theology' of the UCA".

In his September letter to ministerial colleagues the Rev Rob Brown (General Secretary) explained the decision. "Due to the changing nature of society and the changing needs of the Church, this committee will be discontinued . . ."

In the Preamble to the ACC's Theological Declaration & Commentary we offer the prayer that the UCA will resist captivity to cultural forces by upholding the apostolic faith defined in its own Basis of Union. "The gospel as public truth" is deliberately placed first in the five sections of the theological declaration because we believe "the Cross of Christ is not on the periphery of personal existence; rather, the Cross stands at the centre of the world's political, public life" (p.20).

The Standing Committee's decision implies that the ethics of the church needs to be determined first by "the changing nature of society" rather

than to reflect faithfully the truth given to us in Jesus Christ.

Further, those who are now to prepare position papers on various ethical issues must ensure they understand the "grounded theology" of the UCA.

The implication here is that the previous committee's Terms of Reference, grounded in the unique, prophetic testimony of the Scriptures and framed by the Basis of Union now needs to be replaced by some other, undefined "ground".

The ACC's theological declaration and commentary describes the ground from which the church's ethics grows.

"For Christians, doctrine and ethics cannot be separated. In the incarnation of the Son of God our humanity is joined to his. As Christ does not live in some realm 'beyond' this world, we are called to responsible, ethical living in this world.

"Ethics and daily living are supremely grounded in regular faithful worship. In our homes and marriages; in our places of work, study and recreation; in public engagement; in times of joy and sadness; we glorify God. Worship and ethics cannot be separated" (p.36).

It remains to be seen what kind of ethics will be formulated within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania drawn from some other "ground".

ANSVAR Religious Press Association Awards

No wins this year, but a Highly Commended for Peter Bentley's review of the film *Bran Nue Dae* in the February 2010 ACCatalyst. The judge commented: This is a well-researched review, with a lengthy preamble providing useful background that helps the reader gain perspective before a detailed

analysis of this Australian film's story line. The setting is in and around Broome in WA at the end of the 1960s, and the reviewer suggests at the outset that the Christian faith is central to understanding the experience of Aboriginal people in the film. Although the film is analysed in considerable detail, the review

is easy reading with a deftness of style and word choice that prevents it from becoming heavy going. This approach matches the general brightness of the film. The review neatly weaves a Christian perspective throughout, but not in a judgmental way. This is an enthusiastic and entertaining piece of writing!

ACC report summaries

ACC National Council

Since the last Annual General Meeting the National Council has convened three teleconferences and also held a two day face-to-face meeting in Sydney from Monday March 7 to Tuesday March 8, 2011. This meeting included the chairs or delegates from the Commissions and Boards and is a strategic time for review and planning.

Arising from the last AGM, the Council received the arrangements for the finalisation of the Robert Iles Memorial Lecture and the associated fund (locally co-ordinated by a SA group), and established a Marriage task Group. The National Council thought it unwise to establish another Commission. The Task Group on Christian Marriage and the Family has been given specific tasks, drawing members from the Social responsibility and Doctrine and Theology Commissions with some additional resource people. The group produced the ACC Statement on Marriage.

Treasurer's Report

National Council was pleased with the generous response to our appeal for funds last year, and we ended the year with an accumulated surplus of \$49,783. This was not enough to allow ACC to appoint a full-time Director, and the National Council continues to discuss ways of increasing the profile of ACC., and of further supporting the fine work of our Commissions and Boards. We managed to meet all our objectives this year without increasing our operating budget. Stephen Andrews, who reorganised our accounts in the previous year, has continued to provide excellent accounting service to ACC and we received an unqualified Auditor's report during August. We will have to wait to see the full extent of our continuing appeal before committing to any new ACC initiatives later this year. We believe that the Lord will provide for opportunities to act as good stewards for his Kingdom, and we are grateful for his, and your, support.

Colin Adam, ACC Treasurer

Congregational and Group Membership at 30 June 2011.

State	Congregations	Groups	Clusters	Total
NSW	39	4	1	44
Northern	1			1
QLD	17	1	1	19
SA	50	1	1	52
Tasmania	5		2	7
Victoria	9	4	2	15
WA	5			5
TOTALS	126	10	7	143

ACC Board of Communication

Introduction: Teleconferences were held on 25 October 2010 and 25 February 2011, and a day meeting conducted in Sydney on 28th July 2011. The Board reports through four committees.

1. Media and Public Relations

The BOC is helping with the development of a support network for the wider ACC community at the 13th Assembly to be held in July 2012 in Adelaide. This network will provide resources and comment as needed for evangelical members attending the Assembly, and media comment via the ACC Chair.

Facebook arrangements – Our 'fan page' has over 70 members, and is used to share information about the ACC and wider resources. The main ACC website has facebook sections included enabling links to be made by members highlighting our resources and comments direct to facebook.

2. *ACCatalyst*

Editorial matters are considered through email communication between the Editor (John Sandeman) and Executive Editor (Max Champion). A general discussion is held at the yearly Sydney meeting. Six editions of *ACCatalyst* were published in 2010, and this pattern has continued in 2011. At the July 2011 meeting, the BOC decided to continue providing six editions per year. An index (2007-2010) is available on the ACC website (excel format).

The BOC has been very pleased with the standard of the editions and

strongly affirmed the work of John Sandeman.

3. Review Committee (including internal publications)

The Board undertook a review of the design and appearance of our publications and finalised a new colour scheme. All ACC pamphlets have now been revamped and are available as e-publications in the new versions, though these versions vary slightly depending on the subject matter. New print runs will include the new look. The Marriage statement is the first to be produced in this new style, and will also be produced in a special edition.

The review committee has continued to review and proof ACC publications, especially *ACCatalyst*, and *Seeds for Harvest*.

4. Websites

Confessing Congregations website.

Since the last report, over two hundred new resources and entries have been added. This website is the prime resource website and has a wide range of resources and devotional content as well as being the repository for all ACC documents. The committee has continued to look at changes to the main Confessing Congregations website. Future changes are being considered to make it more interactive, including the use of more visual resources like Youtube.

Uniting Views. The new website has a limited range of material and papers. To date, ACC has not received the number of papers it was hoped on some topics, but the site still provides an alternate viewpoint,

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allowing some substantial contributions to current issues. The website committee is exploring ways to make this site more engaging.

Professor Pat Noller, Convenor

Social Responsibility Commission

In the last year the SRC has worked on a number of matters. One has been a Statement on Euthanasia which went through a number of drafts but now is complete and has been approved by the council and prepared for publication. A statement on Integral Mission and the relationship of social responsibility and evangelism was forwarded to *ACCatalyst* for possible publication.

Rev Ross Carter, Convenor.

Discipleship and Evangelism Commission

The Commission has been involved in preparing two major publications.

1) The Longest Journey

Rev Greg Pearce (from Coromandel Valley Uniting Church) has written a resource called *The Longest Journey*. It is a discipleship (and evangelistic) study designed for seekers, new and old Christians, to work through the essentials of the Christian faith with a mentor, or in a group. Arrangements are being made for publishing.

2) "Conversation about the New Heaven and New Earth"

After the popularity of our last DVD series (*Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism*) we produced a second series called *Conversations about the New Heaven and New Earth*. This is a series that discusses the resurrection, the fulfillment of all things in Christ, the hope sure we have (which modernity lost). The series was filmed on Aug 3rd at Clare in South Australia, and this time four people joined in the conversations (Rev Derek Schiller, Rev Simon Dent, Rev Deane Meatheringham and Rev Jonathon Button).

Rev Derek Schiller, Convenor

Doctrine and Theology

The ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission, based in Melbourne, meets four times per year with business between meetings conducted via email. Its terms of reference are:

1. To develop doctrinal and theological resources as required by the ACC or its National Council. One of our tasks has been to assist ACC members in discerning how/where

the 'progressive Christianity' movements need to be challenged. Of particular concern is the way in which some contemporary liturgies expose the flaws in this 'movement'. Rather than develop a comprehensive publication on this issue, members have agreed to provide short pieces for *ACCatalyst* from time to time.

A brief commentary is being prepared on the church's approved marriage services for the use of ministers preparing couples for marriage.

2. To provide doctrinal and theological advice to ACC members, including responses to doctrinal decisions of the UCA and matters arising from the UCA Working Group on Doctrine (WGD). We continue to follow closely the various doc.bytes published by the WGD via their website. Attention is drawn to the doc.byte "*Living the Christian Life*", which we find perfunctory in content. With respect to the Uniting Network's "*Sacred Union Ceremony*" a critique is being prepared, with implications for the church's approved marriage service (as per No 1 above).

3. To provide specific doctrinal and theological resources and advice to other commissions and boards of the ACC, as required. We have enjoyed communication with the social responsibilities commission on the issue of abortion and look forward to their publication on euthanasia.

4. To provide responses to doctrinal and theological matters referred to the commission by other ACC commissions and boards. The issue of marriage, referred by the National Council, remains the focus of attention. In preparation for a critique of the Uniting Network's 'sacred union ceremony' we have sought advice from our three consultants.

5. To assist the ACC to specify the faith of the church doctrinally. We encourage all members of the ACC to use the theological declaration and commentary; trusting that they will continue to provide members with a sound doctrinal basis for refuting some of the contemporary 'doctrines' which are clearly antithetical to the witness of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. We continue to recommend their use for preaching, teaching and group discussion. Our goal is primarily to support the ACC in confessing the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as articulated in the Basis of Union and to apply this 'benchmark' to

any of the work we undertake. Our concern is for the nihilism evident in what Newbigin describes as a pagan culture hostile to the gospel.

Dr Rosalie Hudson. Convenor

Cross Cultural Commission

The Cross Cultural Commission has begun to make inroads in connecting with key Indigenous leaders throughout Australia, and also is making more contact through the 7 UCA Annual National Conferences for Migrant-ethnic communities. The conferences have become extremely significant in terms of numbers and the increasing depth of connections and the Commission plans to connect with all National Conferences in 2012.

Rev Lulu-'OHa'angana Senituli, Convenor

Prayer Network

The Prayer Network developed a prayer support programme for the ACC Conference 8-10 September, and met as a network for prayer and fellowship the day before the conference. Jill Walker concluded as secretary, and we thanked her for her service. She will be greatly missed as she has been a blessing to the team.

Monthly prayer diary. This is a key part of our ministry. I do not always send through a reminder regarding prayer requests for the prayer diary. However, please feel free to send through at any time any prayer request or praise points and I will include in the diary.

Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki, Convenor

Youth Report

ACC Youth (ACCY) is still in its infancy, but planning with prayerful consideration is continuing. Coming back from the Emerging Leaders Award (ELA) in South Australia (February 2011), I have been prayerfully seeking the Lord on the next steps of the ACCY strategy whilst also encouraging youth along the way to be part of the ACC.

The short term goals for ACCY are:

- Outlining the vision of ACC Youth in consultation with ACC National Council

- Outlining the national, state, regional and local strategy of ACCY

- Encouraging, connecting and communicating with ACC congregations and non-ACC congregations

Lupe Tapuehuelu, National Youth Coordinator

ACC state-by-state reports

The State Movements reported to the AGM as a group, with additional comment from Tasmania State Movement, and also from individuals in Victoria and WA, where there are no formal ACC state networks.

ACC NSW Report

The NSW Committee has met regularly throughout 2010/11. The main business of the Committee in 2010 was the planning and preparation for the Annual ACC National Conference held at Camden UC in September 2010.

We express again our appreciation to the Camden Congregation for their willingness to host such an event, their hospitality and ministry of service.

We conduct two members meetings each year (April and October) for the purposes of encouraging ACC members in NSW and appointing the NSW Committee annually.

This past year we have been blessed to have as our speakers Barry Chant and Max Champion (October 2010) who were able to provide us with insightful comment on where the UCA is at, and the work of the ACC in its midst.

In April 2011 Pastor Andrew Chin from Wesley Mission shared with us his experience at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in South Africa in 2010, and its challenge to the Churches of the task of evangelism.

The Committee also sought to encourage ACC Congregations, groups and individuals where they are at throughout NSW.

Chairperson of the NSW movement, Ian Weeks, had the great privilege of preaching and speaking at a number of Congregation and group events in 2010, especially in regional and rural NSW. Ian visited Congregations in small country towns and was greatly encouraged by the faithfulness of those Congregations and ACC members.

It has been encouraging to get regular reports from the Hunter Cluster of ACC members, who, even though at times may feel somewhat powerless in the bigger picture of

that Presbytery, nonetheless perform a vital ministry of encouragement to each other as they meet and pray for each other and the wider cause of Gospel work. We have two ACC member Congregations in the Hunter Presbytery and this is a great blessing, with another Congregation expressing some interest which is encouraging. NSW Chair Ian Weeks and National Officer Peter Bentley have been occasional guests at these Hunter Cluster gatherings.

It has been interesting to observe the interaction between the ACC and the NSW Synod, primarily through the Moderator's column in the monthly Synod *Insights* magazine, and subsequent exchanges in the letters page of that magazine, as well as in *ACC Catalyst*. A sign that our theological view is heard, even if not welcomed or respected?

We have indicated to the Synod that a delegation from ACC NSW is willing and available to continue in dialogue with the Synod as the need arises.

A national Pastor's refreshment conference held in August 2011, Oxygen 2011, hosted by Katoomba Christian Convention, and featuring John Piper and John Lennox, provided the NSW Committee the opportunity to sponsor a group booking of 10 ACC Church leaders to attend this event.

ACC NSW subsidized 10 ACC Pastors to attend this large gathering of pastors and church leaders across the denominational spectrum for quality Bible teaching, encouragement, networking and refreshment.

It is interesting to note that the organisers, KCC, contacted the ACC through Peter Bentley in order to invite evangelical UCA leaders to the launch of this event concept in 2010.

We hope that there will be further opportunities in the future to be involved in similar like-minded ecumenical ventures where orthodox and evangelical UCA pastors and leaders can be strengthened in their faith and empowered in their ministry.

Ian Weeks

Chairperson ACC NSW Movement

ACC Queensland

The State committee meets every three months. During the last term we welcomed two new members; Dr Joel Corney and Mr Jim Hill and grieved the death of Revd Dr Charles Noller. Professor Pat Noller serves the committee as an efficient secretary. Other members include Revd Ivan Kirk (Chair) Revd Dr Lloyd Williams, Revd Col Shenfield, Revd Denis Conomos and Revd Dr Robert Brennan.

A highlight of the past year was the visit of Revd Dr Max Champion. Over a weekend (29th/31st October) Max delivered two addresses on the 'Jesus Seminar' in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast and preached at Paradise Point ACC congregation on the Gold Coast.

The events were well attended and we are grateful for Max's commitment to our work in Queensland. We reciprocated with a visit to Victoria! Revd Col Shenfield spent a weekend of ministry and encouragement with the congregation at Kyabram.

Regional Activities

Denis Conomos convenes an ACC fellowship group on the South side of Brisbane, which meets on the last Friday of each month.

Our agenda includes opening devotions, a talk given by a member of the group on a chosen topic, a report on what the ACC is doing throughout Australia and closing prayer.

Some of the topics discussed in the past twelve months have been: The Preamble added to the Constitution, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali's visit to Brisbane, Philip Yancey's book 'What's So Amazing About Grace', Christian Marriage and the 'Gay Marriage' issue, and Baptism.

Lloyd Williams convenes an ACC fellowship group on the Sunshine Coast which gathers bi-monthly. The subjects considered vary, e.g., orthodox doctrines, Christian morality, and spiritual experience.

Also, the format changes: prayer sessions, Bible studies, speakers, DVDs etc. The sessions are always a blessing.

We are very aware of our weakness when it comes to effecting change

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in either the church or the world, but this throws all back on God. The get-togethers are infrequent because we don't want to infringe on local church timetables.

Rev Euan Macdonald and the Revd Dr Hedley provide good leadership in the centre and north of our State and are able to distribute *ACC-Catalyst* and other ACC information through the presbytery networks. Please continue to pray for our work in Queensland and may it please God to use it for his glory.

Rev. Ivan Kirk, Convenor

ACC SA

Since our AGM in June last year the SA State Movement of ACC has been very active in conducting a range of meetings and events.

In August last year we began holding our Monthly Meetings on a Friday evening—prayer at 5, tea at 6 and meeting at 7pm. This format, together with the intention to take the meetings around to different ACC congregations, has changed our monthly gatherings from a 'nuts and bolts' committee style meeting, to an opportunity for prayer, fellowship and information sharing that has engaged the congregations we visited and others from those areas—Glenunga (August), Golden Grove (October), Coromandel Valley (November), Tea Tree Gully (February), Lobethal (March), Balaklava (April), Golden Grove (May).

In addition to these general meetings we have held a number of special events:

A 'Dig Here' Seminar was held on August 21st 2010 in Waikerie on the theme of Confessing Christ—in our hearts, in our church, and in our world.

The major event of this last year was the *Emerging Leaders Award* weekend held at the Longwood Campsite on 3rd–6th February. Eighteen young people from 14 congregations in SA, NSW and Victoria were treated to three days of resourcing, envisioning and encouragement.

The weekend was the brain-child of Rev Don Purdey, and a huge appreciation must go to him for the vision, courage and persistence required to bring this dream to reality.

With a budget four times our annual SA budget, the weekend was, from first to last, a venture of faith, and by all accounts was an outstanding success.

At the end of June we held a combined Resourcing and Encouragement Event with Hope Network at Port Augusta. Entitled *Christ's Living Gospel, Today: Living in and fulfilling God's local mission*, it sought to assist folk with the mission of God in their local community. The event was attended by about 40 people from Port Augusta, Whyalla, Port Pirie and other places in the North. It was agreed that we succeeded in providing both resourcing and encouragement.

ACC SA also held a Prayer Retreat at the Halbury campsite in May.

On Saturday 29th October we will hold a "Living Waters" seminar at Mt Gambier. The theme will be The Gospel Mission to Marriages and Families.

In addition to the above activities, ACC has been represented through occasions of ministry and preaching conducted by myself and Rev Ben Usher.

When preaching in different places we have carried with us and displayed ACC resources for people to take. This has occurred at Clarendon, Delamere, Lobethal, Coromandel Valley, Bordertown, Yankalilla, Mallala, Two Wells, Port Augusta, Quorn, Port Broughton, Waikerie, Mt Gambier (by Rod James), and Kangarilla, Meadows, Prospect Hill, Range Road, Strathalbyn, Myponga, Inman Valley (by Ben Usher). In April Ben conducted a Spiritual Gifts seminar at Kingscote, Parndana, American River and Stokes Bay on Kangaroo Island.

This was found to be very helpful and the seminar is available to other congregations wishing to undertake it.

We have one active Regional Cluster in SA—the Inner Northern Suburbs Cluster. The group meets once a month for study, prayer and sharing. This opportunity is much appreciated by the participants who belong to congregations not sympathetic to the ACC or to evangelical theology.

Recently discussions have been

held with Hope Mission Network with a view to cooperating in the planning of future events as we did with the Port Augusta event.

Hope Network is affiliated with ACC and many of our objectives overlap. With limitations on our leadership and other resources it makes a lot of sense to work together. At this stage we are planning to make the 'Stir the Fire' event in March/April 2012 a joint event.

As most of you will know our past Convenor, Rev Don Purdey, has contracted motor neurone disease. This sad occurrence has been tempered by Don's amazing sense of well-being in God's gracious care.

Don and Annette have recently returned from about 10 weeks overseas touring Europe and the UK and visiting family there. They have been able to sell their house in Canberra, and hope soon to purchase a home here in Adelaide. Don's main difficulties at the moment have to do with the functioning of his tongue for talking and swallowing.

On behalf of the ACC both within South Australia and nationally we would like to thank Don for his faithful ministry over several years, which he has carried out with vision, and with good humour.

In particular we would like to thank the Lord for the vision that He gave to Don for the *Emerging Leaders Award* camp.

It has turned out to be a resounding success and a great blessing for all who have taken part, not least the awardees, and has provided a model of encouragement for the next generation of young leaders and also to the ACC movement as a whole.

Don's contribution to the confessing movement within the Uniting Church stretches over about 20 years, and compasses the eras of EMU, RA and ACC. As the ACC-SA Movement we wish to acknowledge all that you have done, to thank you most sincerely, and to assure you that you are not forgotten in these present times.

[Don was present at the 2011 AGM and his service acknowledged with a loving tribute.]

*Rev Rod James, Acting Convenor
SA Movement*

Wesleyan Methodists greeting

It is a pleasure to bring greetings to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations at your 2011 National Conference in Keilor Park, Victoria.

The members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia are very aware of the faithful stand taken by the ACC, and we are pleased to offer our encouragement and friendship.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church began in Australia in 1946 in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. God has been with us through some good years and some difficult years, and in 2011 we number 84 congregations spread across seven states and territories in Australia.

Currently we are experiencing a renewed passion for prayer and fasting, with a special focus in our prayers for revival in the Australian church and spiritual awakening in the wider secular culture.

However, we are very conscious that reaping the harvest of a true



Rev. Lindsay Cameron

awakening will be a task too big for any one denomination, and so we are keen to encourage the health and vitality of other like-minded, Bible-believing fellowships across this nation.

I am reminded of Habakkuk's words in chapter 3:2, "Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe

We are keen to encourage the health and vitality of other like-minded, Bible-believing fellowships across this nation.

of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy."

In this time of secularism and complacency, we are praying that God would mercifully send his Spirit to revive our nation.

We are strengthened by the knowledge that the ACC is likewise upholding the truth of the Scriptures and the reality of a personal experience of God's presence.

God bless you.

*Rev. Lindsay Cameron
National Superintendent*

Three seemingly insignificant verses

In just three seemingly insignificant verses in Luke 2:36-38 we find the story of Jesus being dedicated in the temple after his birth. Three small verses, that when we unpack them, can hold for us, some very important and special truths that have inspired and encouraged me, in my journey with the Lord over twenty years.

In these verses we see Anna, and scripture says that she was a Prophetess, the only prophet of God to be recorded for hundreds of years, following the Old Testament book of the prophet Malachi.

She was a widow, a person who had a servant heart, for scripture says that she "served" day and night in the temple. But with a very particular type of serving, and that was with prayer and fastings, never leaving the temple day and night. She was, I believe a person who knew her God-given purpose, always seeking, asking, and also

praying petitions on behalf of others.

Anna was a very pivotal person in history, for she had been given prophetic insight about the coming Messiah and the redemption of Jerusalem. When Mary and Joseph came to the temple to dedicate Jesus, Simeon the Priest was there and also Anna. Anna went up to the Christ child and praised God, giving him thanks for their Saviour. As she looked upon the child, The Holy Spirit quickened in her, and she received divine insight that the prophecies that had been predicted would be fulfilled through this appointed offspring, whom she and many others were expecting and anticipating. Anna gave thanks to God for Jesus. God had indeed raised up Anna, and she had seen Jesus as a baby, the Saviour of mankind at the Temple. Scripture says, she continued to speak of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

For us too, in this hour, it seems

as though we have been waiting for something. As God has placed seeds in our hearts, like prophetic words, waiting for the redemption of Christ's Bride the Church. It seems to me that the "time is at hand", to take a stand and speak boldly, just as Anna did. I believe that in this hour God is encouraging us to seek Him personally, in prayer and worship for boldness and empowerment, to be that bold Prophetic voice that will not only affect the Church—the Bride of Christ who needs so badly to hear God's voice to her, but into the future generations, just as Anna's did.

Let's pray—Father, forgive us where we haven't spoken strongly and with purpose for you and release and empower with boldness our voices to speak strongly for you. AMEN

*Mandy Scott
prayernet@confessingcongregations.com*

THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

Our goals include

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.
- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

- grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world

- develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

- iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

- iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

- v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

- vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessing-congregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

ACC DIARY

What happens next:

● October 9: ACC NSW Tonga Gathering: Auburn. Speaker - Rev Ian Weeks.

● October 22: Gospel Central ACC Victoria Regional Seminar: Nyah West, followed by October 23: Max Champion preaching at Kyabram Uniting Church.

● October 29: ACC SA Movement 'Living Waters' seminar at Mt Gambier. The theme will be The Gospel Mission to Marriages and Families.

● October 31: ACC Doctrine and Theology Commission.

● November 14: ACC National Council meeting (teleconference)

● November 25-27: Rod James Seminars: Brisbane (Organised by ACC Queensland)

Consider making a Bequest to the ACC

It has been wonderful to see the support and hope evidenced for the ACC appeal, and in particular the enthusiasm for a National Director. Some members have indicated that they would like to make a larger contribution to the future work of the ACC, but are not presently able to do this, and thought one way was to provide for the ACC in their wills.

This is a very helpful suggestion, as people can contribute to the on-going and long-term work of the confessing movement. All you need to do is specify in your will the name of the organisation, and the amount to be provided:

For example, "I give ... to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. for the general purposes thereof".



Levin Sorbo plays Ben Walker preaching

Alternative lives

What If... (2010)

A new Christian DVD raises the question, what could have happened? It is unlikely that any of us have failed to wonder what would life have been like if we had followed a different career, been brought up in a different family, or as in this case, not caught that bus out of that small town?

The film is well worth seeing, with consistent acting and several reasonably well-known Hollywood actors (I will leave it to you to see if you know some of their major roles), and the male and female leads (Kevin Sorbo playing the businessman/preacher Ben Walker), and Kristy Swanson (Wendy) provide a strong foundation. It could however do with a bit more editing to make it tighter and not labour some scenes. For Christian movies I especially recommend a 90-100 minute time-frame.

The theme of what could have been if ... has been a central theme for many films over the years including one of my favourites (I am a Jimmy Stewart fan), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *The Family Man* (2000). In this film, we meet Ben Walker, established in a business career, financially well-off, living a great consumer life and on the way to a seemingly suitable marriage. However, 15 years earlier he looked set to marry his childhood sweetheart and become a minister. The call of consumerism was stronger than his love for either Wendy or the Lord.

After a car accident, Ben wakes up and is taken by what one could describe as a 'semi-friendly angel' to the life he could have had. He is now a minister, about to start a new ministry in the small town, and has

two daughters with Wendy. There are some quite witty, perhaps mildly satirical scenes. Worth mentioning are:

- His first sermon in the church he has just been called to. After this, people are wondering if they have the right preacher. I found this to be a wonderful critique of some American style prosperity religion as well.
- His attempts at relating to his teenage daughter. There are some tips here how not to help your children.

The director, Dallas Jenkins has stated "The most consistent feedback we get is that even though the film is about a preacher, it doesn't feel preachy, and that the faith aspect feels organic and real."

Yes, it is helpful that they do not try to 'protect' the preacher image. His fallibility clearly comes out, and yet you also see him responding to the grace of God that he experiences and finally accepts for himself.

How does the movie end, and draw the themes together? Now, a comment here could reveal too much, but I want to refer to the dedication in the film to Bonnie Jenkins as this deeply relates to the theme of following God's will. The producer Dallas Jenkins answered a question from one viewer outlining: "Bonnie is my grandmother, my dad's mother, who passed away late last year. She left a legacy of faith and was an incredible wife and mother, dedicated to Christ and sold out for the faith. No one ever questioned that she was acting within God's Will."

What If... is available from Heritage HM Film Distribution for purchase at www.movieschangepeople.com and nationally through all Christian retail outlets.

The Tree of Life (2011, PG)

I review this film with some hesitation, since it may not be an easy film for some members to watch, but I encourage you to stick with it. The film won the major award at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival (the Palme d'Or)

The director Terrence Malick is actually well-known for not directing many films, but each film has had an impact on film development. The *Tree of Life* stars Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain, and they all give wonderful performances.

This is a film about life and death within the Christian understanding of living in God's world. Many reviewers have failed to see the Christian underpinning, and have looked merely at cultural or sometimes church ideas. Woven throughout the film are biblical references and verses, which only one familiar with the bible will be able to pick up.

The setting is primarily Texas in the 1950s and centres around a typical American family, the O'Briens. The second setting is modern-day and focuses on one of the now adult children Jack (Sean Penn). The adult Jack has not coped well with his father, played by Brad Pitt.

He is perhaps a typical 1950s man, wanting to be a loving father, but caught in the web of distance, pride and his need to train his boys. They are church-goers, as many were in the 1950s, but only his wife has taken on the faith. The challenge to their beliefs and their faith comes, and how they respond illustrates a personal excursion into the foundation of their faith.

For the adult Jack, it is only as he experiences God's grace, that he is able to see and understand the world God has provided now and glimpse the new heaven that will be. For now, he is enabled to forgive and experience a new life.

There is such beauty, joy and also sorrow in this film, including some very illustrative film-work. It shows the broken and fallen world, but also the grace and the hope of the redemption of creation. The love that bursts forth at times in this film is the love of God that we know as the grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Sit back, enjoy the ride and reflect on this piece of philosophical filmmaking with a Christian centre.

Peter Bentley