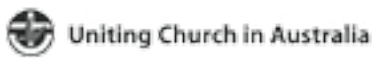




All of this is us



sociological and psychological levels, but about the theological bases that lie behind how we decide issues around human sexuality. Do we have any agreement at all on the Biblical and theological bases for our decisions? What are the irreducible essentials which we supposedly share? While the blogs and public statements of some individuals and groups are not official, and probably do not represent the thinking of the Commission on the Way Forward, it is discouraging to read of people who believe that our unity consists of “the words of Jesus,” or “our diversity,” or “love,” or even “our baptism.” We are not baptized United Methodists but Christians. Thus baptism may be a mark of unity, but it is the mark of unity with all believers, not just with United Methodists. Appeals to qualities like “love” or “grace” as the basis for unity make no sense since there is no special United Methodist understanding of what is uniquely United Methodist about “love” and “grace.” Appeals to “diversity” are as confusing as the reference in the 1972 doctrinal statement about “pluralism” as the identifying mark of our United Methodist theology. Words like pluralism and diversity have more to do with relativism and confusion than with the gospel.

There is currently unrest in the trenches of United Methodism. Someone has said it will take a miracle for the Commission to come up with a proposal for a way forward that can satisfy a majority of United Methodists. That is true. However, miracles have been known to happen!

*By Dr. Riley B. Case*  
Happenings: 27 June 2017

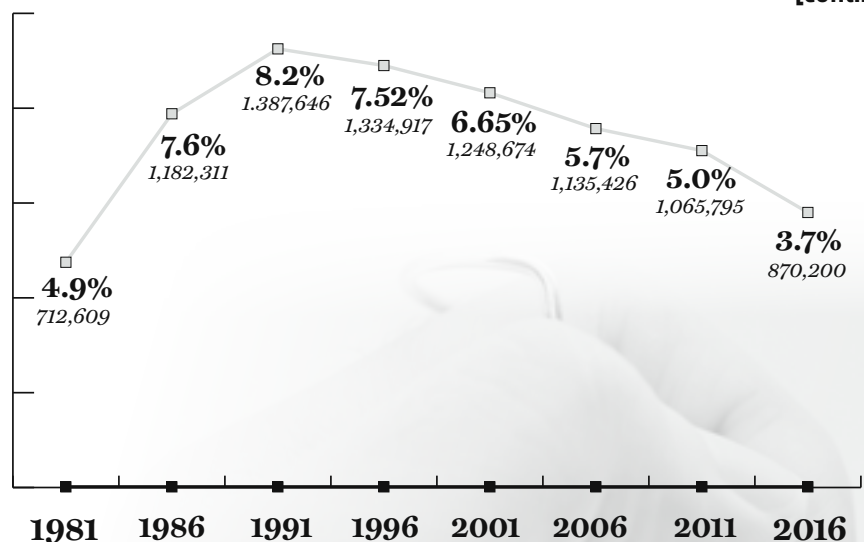
## The National Census and the Uniting Church: A basic overview

In the year before union the Census recorded for the three uniting churches an affiliation rate of 14.3%. Forty years later this rate had decreased to approximately 6%. The Uniting Church still remains the third largest Christian grouping (3.7%), after Catholic (22.6%) and Anglican (13.3%). The decrease for the UCA between 2011 and 2016 was the largest to date - 26%. Comparing attendance and affiliation, my estimate is that less than 10% of the affiliates could be counted as regular attenders.

The Census has always asked basic questions on religion in terms of affiliation or basic identification, though in 2016, it controversially placed the No Religion box, first introduced in the 1991 Census, at the top of the religion listing, perhaps confirming that even those who say they do not have a religion are not religiously neutral. The No religion category increased from 22.3% in 2011 to 30.1%, a nearly 35% increase. **Christian is still the majority affiliate religion with 52.1%.**

For the Uniting Church, apart from 1986 and 1991, the percentage of UCA affiliates has decreased each census. Some Uniting Church leaders have mistakenly argued that 1986 and 1991 were proof that the public were connecting to the UCA, but apart from the fact that attendance records were going in the other direction, the numerical increase had nothing to do with an interest in the Uniting Church. Firstly all those who were still recording themselves as ‘Methodist’ were now rigorously coded to the Uniting Church (from 1986), and secondly, some non-members had finally caught up with the fact that there was a Uniting Church and had enough knowledge to tick the box they had worked out was closest to their antecedent church, though it could be argued that many of these could have been included in continuing Presbyterian affiliation or continuing Congregational affiliation.

[cont...]



Source: ABS National Census 1981-2016

## Hearing the Word of God Set Free

Romans 1:2

*“Through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”*

We who have committed our lives to Jesus Christ should see that Paul’s teaching about the law has a double meaning. Either as God’s power in the spiritual world or as sin operating in human nature. The first frees us and the second binds us.

Paul makes this message personal for us all when he says *“the Spirit of life sets ME free.”* Our freedom is from sin and ultimate death. We experience overwhelming joy to realise that He sent His only Son into this world for that very purpose, to free us.

We have two alternatives, either to respond to the sin in our lives or for God to create in us His Spiritual nature. As Paul says *“If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.”*

The more I travel this earthly journey, seeking to understand the will of God, the more I am convinced that He expects us to make decisions and not to leave it all to Him. He has equipped us with minds, feelings and receptive hearts for that very purpose.

But it is far more important that we listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit when He says “no” or “be careful” or “follow Me.” Above all we should never seek the guidance of God concerning an act that is forbidden in the Living Word of God

*Reverend Bob Imms is a member of the ACC Southern Cluster in Tasmania.*

## *The National Census and the Uniting Church: A basic overview (cont...)*

### What are some factors influencing the real affiliation decline?

**1** Apart from the main factor of the general ageing of UC affiliates, there have been a large number of worshipping members who have left since 1997 and joined other denominations. The continuing debate may also have affected non-members who did not want to identify.

**2** Continuing worshipping members of the Uniting Church who decided not to tick the Uniting Church box on the census form, and instead wrote in Christian or another description. The general Christian category has continued to grow, and is now the 4th largest Christian group.

**3** The ‘departing’ group of older nominal affiliates and the increased number of descendants with little Uniting heritage. Basically, if one’s grandparents were Uniting, one may have had a small but still nominal link, but once the initial nominal generations depart there is less likelihood of even nominal awareness among the new generations

What is significant is that the number of affiliates in 2017 is a much smaller overall group in comparison to that of 1977. If the Uniting Church affiliation had simply kept pace with the population increase, it would have recorded about three times the number of affiliates.

*Peter Bentley is the National Director for the ACC*