

Retrospective

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I was able to attend one of the major events for the Uniting Church's 40th Anniversary: the 40th Anniversary History Conference held at Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide in June. While it was not a large gathering, there were many past and present leaders of the Uniting Church, especially for the Q & A Forum 'The Church in the Public Square', and the launch of the National Historical Society.

It was helpful to be there for the major addresses, especially to record the mention that ACC received in the opening keynote address by historian Renate Howe.

In a wide-ranging overview, Renate referred to the 'problem of the growth of the ACC', and commented on the ACC being 'aggressive' in attack, which she then qualified as 'criticism of the UCA'. She contrasted this with the 'other end' - the progressive Christians: a very open and inclusive group who see more value in questioning, though there seemed to be some question about all the questioning as well. Certainly many questions were raised during this time, including concern about the quality of UCA worship today and how the gospel was seen in the church. Renate suggested that there were no prominent theological leaders now, compared to the early period (and especially the period of the union negotiations with leading scholars, Davis McCaughey, George Yule and Colin Williams, among many). There seemed to be an idea that the theological deficit today made it difficult to develop a theological vision. She also reviewed the change in the involvement of women from union to today and commented on the development of the bureaucratic nature of the UCA today and issues of governance, highlighting the 'fire sale' in Victoria that had taken place without local cooperation, and also the development of a bureaucracy base in social and community service that was focussed on administration rather than witness.

In his address, Dr Glen O'Brien reflected on 'What John Wesley might say to the Uniting Church?' Glen

offered many thoughts including the need to 'plunder the Egyptians'; reading and understanding the culture widely and making use of what we can. He also argued that while many have rejected the older models of evangelism (context of hellfire), they have not found a new model, and yet like Wesley we need to offer Christ anew - the words of acceptance and assurance. He also affirmed a love for the church and while there are flaws, encouraged us to continue to minister as Wesley did in his day.

Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood provided an overview of the Basis of Union and its theological development, commenting on the difficulties with episcopal theology and opposition of some Presbyterians. It would certainly have been a different church if the Anglican connection had been developed. He also considered the different texts leading to the authority of the 1971 Basis of Union.

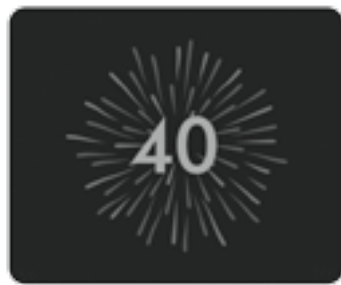
Historian and also a UC minister in Queensland, Rev. Dr Julia Pitman presented a tour de force critique of many aspects of the church, stating we needed to own our own mistakes. Areas highlighted including theological training, the collapse in presbytery care, lowering of standards for committees (often wrong people in positions), mishandling of the sexuality debate, the placement system and the unreality of profiles of congregations and the decreased ecumenical context.

One very apt pointer was provided by Julia as she noted that the denomination as a whole has not set aside historians to provide reflection and help with contemporary debate and suggested that the UCA had survived despite itself. She concluded by stating that we just cannot look back and say it was lovely in 1977, but also we should not simply say we are just going to die.

In another seminar, long-standing UC activist Warren Talbot provided another paper on the UC and LGBTIQ members, and in response to a question indicated his view and hope for the future that the position for LGBTIQ members will be a 'gold standard', just like that for women ministers.

Another Uniting time

I attended the Sydney **Uniting (formerly UnitingCare)** Future Horizons forum on June 24th. This is **Uniting's** (NSW & the ACT) strategy project designed to "determine, in light of God's Mission, what and where our work should be into the future". Presbyteries, congregation members and other Uniting Church stakeholders were invited to



All of this is us



Uniting Church in Australia

Burning or Bushed?



Burning Or Bushed? The Presbyterian Church of Australia 40 Years On

Edited by Paul F. Cooper
& David A. Burke (2017)
Eider Books
PO Box 878
Stanhope Gardens 2768

Two churches were celebrating on 22 June 2017 – the Uniting Church was celebrating its 40th birthday, and the Presbyterian Church was celebrating the 40th anniversary of its rebirth.

Burning Or Bushed, with a nod to the Burning Bush (for long a symbol of Presbyterian Churches worldwide) brings together a number of essays by various ministers and elders involved in overseeing the rebuilding operation, in many cases starting from scratch. Those who were committed to Church Union had been given to declaring that Church Union was the will of God, while those who were continuing at first refuted that assertion. Forty years on, both can agree. Church Union was the will of God for both groups, the one to move on freed from past shackles, the other to go forward backwards – always reforming according to the Word of God.

May God bless us all.

Rev Bob Thomas is a Presbyterian Minister and editor of New Life Christian Magazine (available as on-line publication: <http://www.nlife.com.au/>). This review first appeared in New Life: 15 July 2017 Vol 80 No 2

The DNA of the UCA

Rev Dr John Squires

*(Director of Education and Formation,
WA Synod)*

For reference - his ten strands forming the essential DNA of the UCA distributed to the May 2017 WA Presbytery meeting)

-  a church which is committed to working ecumenically with other Christian denominations.
-  a church which values the ministry of all the people of God
-  a church which is committed to equality and mutuality of women and men in ministry.
-  a church in Covenant with the First Peoples of Australia.
-  a multicultural church, which rejoices in the diversity of cultures and languages
-  a church which is prepared to engage in difficult discussions about contentious issues.
-  a strong commitment to advocating for justice for all.
-  a church which honours the environment and supports a sustainable lifestyle.
-  the importance, when we gather in council, of seeking to discern the will of God.
-  a firm commitment to strong professional standards,

Retrospective (cont...)

participate through a survey, and also forums. Firstly, I want to commend **Uniting** for organising these times and for the effort of the **Uniting** staff and members. I

thought they provided a helpful day for feedback, and it was disappointing that so few people attended the Sydney forum (though there were 5 other regional forums). It was very

evident that a key question for **Uniting** is related to the current disconnection of many congregations with **Unit-**

ing. This of course has arisen over the years of increased bureaucratisation and centralisation of church services, and **Uniting** is hoping to develop better connections again.

It was interesting to learn of another significant disconnection, namely that of the placement of resources and areas of contemporary need, especially in Sydney. A question was raised as to whether congregations in more advantaged areas (where

most UC congregations presently are) might support a re-direction of resources to more disadvantaged areas? Would this create new opportunities for the Church?

One intriguing aspect in the 13 minute video introduction (note: *Future Horizons* is available on the Uniting website) was the inclusion of the historical example of a local UC, Gerringong, and their development of a ministry in aged care. This local service and connection is continuing in Gerringong UCA today with a wide range of activities supported by a thriving local congregation under the leadership of ACC NSW Chair, Rev. Peter Chapman.

