

**Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting** 5th June - 14th July 2018

**JESUS CHRIST**

*“ Abundant Grace Liberating Hope ”*



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## **20-DAY DEVOTIONAL**

**IN DIALOGUE WITH THE BASIS OF UNION**

**OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**

Developed by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Prayer Network and teachers of the School of Faith, to be used during the Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting in the 40 days in the lead up to and during the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in 2018, Melbourne, Australia. The devotional is to be repeated once to make up the 40 days.

### **ALSO INCLUDES**

+ **ALL-AGE LEARNING OPTIONS ON THE BASIS OF UNION**  
+ **BIBLE STUDIES in DIALOGUE WITH THE BASIS OF UNION**  
and **THE UNITING CHURCH LOGO.**

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## **DAY 1: PARAGRAPH 1**

### **SOLE LOYALTY TO CHRIST THE LIVING HEAD OF THE CHURCH!**

#### **REV DR. HEDLEY FIHAKI**



Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki is the National Chair and Spokesperson for ACC. His Current placement is the Minister of the Word - Mooloolaba Uniting Church, Sunshine Coast Qld. He has been a member of the National Assembly 2006, 2009, 2015 and has been elected as a member in 2018. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READINGS:** 1 Corinthians 3: 10-15; Philippians 2: 9-11.

**KEY VERSE:** *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 3:11 (NRSV)

#### **PARAGRAPH 1: BASIS OF UNION**

*The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia. They pray that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit..... To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church... **Basis of Union Paragraph 1***

#### **REFLECTION:**

Three things stand out:

1. The three churches saw themselves as being part of a church movement that was not 'its own denomination' but part of the fellowship of the whole Church Catholic, witnessing to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church.

2. The three churches 'prayed' that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
3. The three churches 'declared' their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living head of the Church.

As the Uniting Church seeks to move forward together in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, in the light of the radical proposal by the ASC to redefine marriage in July, we are reminded of our historical and ecumenical commitment to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ. That is, the UCA cannot go off on a tangent apart from its commitment to live and work within the faith and unity of the Only Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. To do so will be a departure from our Basis of Union and our Constitution. The aim of Assembly, therefore, is NOT to try maintain a 'diversity of views' on this matter as if 'diversity' of theologies is in itself the highest good and goal of the Church, but, to help the Church to move forward together in 'sole loyalty' to Christ.

Contrary to the significant flaw in the ASC report, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations 'declares' that Marriage enters into the substance of the faith and therefore not a matter that allows for a diversity of opinion.

The issue before us is not human sexuality as such, but the authority of Scripture. When we speak of the authority of Scripture (BOU para.5) we are speaking about the lordship of Christ as the 'living head of the Church'. And the lordship of Christ is the essence of the gospel itself. To deny this reality, is to promote a totally different gospel to the one outlined in the UCA's Basis of Union.

**Prayer:** *Our Father, we pray that Assembly will be bold in helping the Uniting Church to move forward together with the whole Church Catholic in sole loyalty to your Son, our Lord, Jesus the Christ, the living head of your Church. Amen!*

## **DAY 2. PARAGRAPH 2 BASIS OF UNION OUR HOPE: MAY WE BE ONE IN CHRIST**

### **REV DR ROBERT BRENNAN**



Rev Dr Robert Brennan is the Training Manager of Wontulp-Bi-Buya (Wontulp-Bi-Buya College is to support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander church and community leaders through study programs leading to awards in theology, suicide prevention, addictions management & community development.) He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

### **BIBLE READING: JOHN 17:6-26**

**KEY VERSE: JOHN 17: 21** *I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me.*

### **PARAGRAPH 2. THE BASIS OF UNION: OF THE WHOLE CHURCH (1971)**

*The Uniting Church lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. She recognises that she is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission. Recalling the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries, she looks forward to a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and the Church's unity expressed, in similar Councils. She thankfully acknowledges that the uniting Churches were members of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies, and she will seek to maintain such membership. She remembers the special relationship which obtained between the several uniting Churches and other Churches of similar traditions, and will continue to learn from their witness and be strengthened by their fellowship. She is encouraged by the existence of United Churches in which these and other traditions have been incorporated, and wishes to learn from their experience. She believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end she commits herself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. She declares her desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches.*

## REFLECTION

Recently while our leadership team was visiting a remote community we were asked a serious question, “What is this Ecumenism we are hearing about?” I was stunned. I’ve been in the UCA since union and Wontulp-Bi-Buya has been around for over 34 years. Both have been ecumenical success stories. Therefore the three of us from different traditions were not expecting this as a serious question. But we shouldn’t have been surprised as many remote communities were once one-denomination missions. Often the locals’ experience of the church has only been of that one denomination or their local variation of it. So we were able to share the joy and good news of being able to work together as the church in the whole earth (Greek: *oikumene* from which the word Ecumenical comes from means the whole world). It is easy to lose sight of the big picture in church. Our view can be too often reduced to my church or my faith whereas Jesus never lost sight of the big picture even under extreme duress in Gethsemane.



The temptation too often is to make our own decisions on our own. Our contemporary society encourages us to do just this in spite of how destructive it is to wider community life. Paragraph 2 reminds us that the Church Christ prayed for is the whole church, not one part of it or one individual. When we make a stand on an issue, and we must at times, we need to be disciplined to remember that we cannot simply go it alone no matter how good we think our reasons. We must be part of the whole. This is both the discipline and the hope, which underpinned the formation of the UCA. It requires that we sense that we move with the whole church. If we ever say that “our denomination has got it right and others are wrong” or “they haven’t got there yet,” we miss both the spirit and practical outworking of Christ’s planned unity in the church.

Can it take time? ABSOLUTELY! The Reformation division of the western church was apparently on the nature of how in Christ we are justified by faith. This is a substance of the faith issue second to none. In the late 1990s the Lutheran and Catholic churches in the USA issued a joint statement on what it means. After the turn of the millennium both traditions ratified the agreement worldwide. Later the Methodist council also added their support and last year the council of Reformed churches signed. 500 years of division is on the way to healing.

## PRAYER

*Father make our prayer like that of Jesus. May we truly be one as You are one. We pray especially for those ideas, traditions and practices, which divide your church. We pray that we would not yield to the easy path of going our own way but be committed to the struggle of remaining together in you.*

## DAY 3: PARAGRAPH 3A BASIS OF UNION BUILT UPON THE ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST

REV. EA (TED) CURNOW



As a retired minister Ted has served in the South Australian and Victorian Synods. He worked with the Methodist Church in the UK for two years and has written about early Methodism in South Australia. He also contributes to a devotional page on the ACC web site.

**BIBLE READING:** Colossians 1:15-23

**KEY VERSE:** COLOSSIANS 1:20 - *through him (Jesus) God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

**PARAGRAPH 3A THE BASIS OF UNION:  
BUILT UPON THE ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ. The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. In love for the world, God gave his Son to take away the world's sin.*

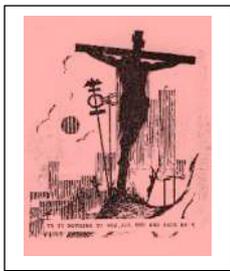
### REFLECTION

Looking at the Uniting Church logo, Jesus Christ stands central in the symbol of the cross as its vertical and horizontal arms span the circle of the world. Amid our sensitivities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the cross represents a primitive, barbaric tool of execution, indeed a devastating, negative defeat, while in contrast the resurrection holds out an unreal hope, a demonstration of a glorious victory.

The power of the cross is found in **who** was executed; in the deity of Christ, as spelt out and embedded in the Nicene Creed. Often people have said that because Jesus rose again he must have been God. Peter turned this around and affirmed the New Testament faith when in Acts Chapter 2 he declared God raised him (Jesus) up because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:24) Later Paul wrote, "*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.*" (Col 2:9,15).

Jesus's decisive death and resurrection involves each of us and is central to Christian belief and to the Uniting Church. This is why Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 3: 10-15 of Jesus as the foundation and of people building on that foundation as a labour that is not in vain. Today as never before we need to know we are not constructing the kingdom of God by our own efforts or oiling the wheels of a machine that is soon going over a cliff.

The early Christians were joyful because they knew themselves to be living in the first, opening days of God's new creation. Selwyn Hughes puts it well. *"Because of what Christ did -- no Christian need ever be intimidated by death. It is death that has failed not he."* Some suggest Christ's resurrection is a spiritual truth that calls us to discover God in our own spirituality, but if it was only 'spiritual' then the material world is left without redemption.



Jesus death and resurrection was not a mere ideal or example to follow, it was nothing less than the climatic event of cosmic history that will result in the creation itself being set free from its slavery to corruption, fear and death. N.T. Wright has said some of the most moving words he ever sings are those in the old Christmas carol, *"Once in Royal David's city -- And our eyes at last shall see him, Through his own redeeming love."* In a hope-less world we have a real reason to worship with hope and to celebrate Jesus.

### **Prayer**

*Risen Lord, stand in the midst of your church and when we are distracted or overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues of the day help us to catch a glimpse of the significance of your victory so that we live in it and in the holy optimism of the gospel. Amen*

## DAY 4 PARAGRAPH 3B

### AMAZING GRACE



**REV IAN CLARKSON**

Rev Ian Clarkson is a Minister of the Word in the UCA and is the Hopenet Field Minister. His home church, the Branches Community Church, Modbury, South Australia

#### **BIBLE READING: TITUS 3: 4-5**

*But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, (Tit. 3:4-5 NIV)*

#### **BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 3B:**

##### **BUILT UPON THE ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST CONT.**

*Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive the Father's love. He himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone*

#### **REFLECTION**

My first life memory at barely 3 years, squatting outside the kitchen window on the farm. Fascinated and mesmerised by the animal swaying a couple of feet from my face, ignorant of terrible danger. A large brown snake coiled and fangs about to strike.

Suddenly a thick trousered leg and boot swung from the side and kicked the reptile from my face. I see it coiling and writhing and slithering away. Years later, just recently, a wondrous thought dawned on me. It was only shortly before, that my father had gathered me up from the orphanage, a relinquished

infant and adopted me in love into his and his childless wife's home. In a split second he risked his life to save his newly adopted infant son.

I count that as all part of the amazing care of the great Father who through His Son has purposed, planned and protected me and by illustration, His whole church to bring us all through into an amazing future of salvation. All people need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know they are saved and all can be saved to the uttermost.

Can Christ save me? Can He deal with the whole deadly situation? Can He save all to the uttermost? The secret shames? The hidden impulses of darkness fearing to have exposed? Can my soul be rid of these portents of the fire of judgement? Yes, answers this amazing grace! I believe. Christ eradicated it all from Divine memory and is remaking me into His very own image. Saved in every respect. From Every serpent strike and sting! Rescued through the Father's mighty action!

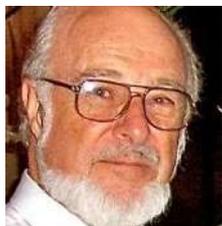
#### **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing this Gospel of everlasting salvation by which all nations might believe and obey you, and for bringing me into your family of righteousness and love. In Jesus name.*

## DAY 5: PARAGRAPH 3C BASIS OF UNION

### THE LIBERATING GIFT

#### PROFESSOR BRIAN HILL



Professor Brian Hill is an Emeritus professor of education at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia and has been an active member and leader in the Uniting Church for many years.

**BIBLE READING:** John 14:23-25, 33; Acts 20: 28

**KEY VERSE:** *“Look after yourselves and everyone the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. Be like shepherds to God’s church. It is the flock that he bought with the blood of his own Son.”* Acts 20: 28 (CEV)

#### **BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 3C BUILT UPON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST CONT.**

*The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. The Church lives between the time of Christ’s death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.*

#### **REFLECTION:**

What is a human being’s natural habitat? Much emphasis is placed these days on the material plane, on which we exist as bodies. But human beings also operate on a spiritual plane. We are conscious selves with powers of thought and choice which go well beyond the biological level of functioning.

At a spiritual level, sadly, our awareness has been darkened by sin, and we need help to function in a co-ordinated way on both levels – as embodied spirits under God’s rule. For this we need the transformation, which is promised to those who turn to Christ. How does that happen?

The key is that Jesus gifts his Holy Spirit to new believers. His Spirit changes the spiritual atmosphere we breathe. We’re not transformed overnight, but our spiritual rehabilitation has begun. All this is in preparation for the day when, having got the body-spirit balance right, we become citizens of the New Creation, which Christ will establish.

Don’t just take my word for it. Read Jesus’s agenda, reflected in the briefing he gave his disciples in John 14:

*23 . . . If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. 25 All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you . . . 33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

As the Basis of Union, in obedience to Scripture, affirms: “the Holy Spirit is given as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation . . . The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring”.

## **PRAYER**

*Thank you, O Lord my God, that I don’t have to make the grade on my own, but have the pledge of Your presence, breath for my soul, as I live and witness en route to my true home in the New Creation. Amen.*

## DAY 6: PARAGRAPH 4 BASIS OF UNION

### IT IS FINISHED!

#### PASTOR ROBYN PAINTER



Pastor Robyn Painter is pastor of Peterborough Uniting Church in rural South Australia. She has previously been a member of National Assembly and has served on the national council of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations.

#### **BIBLE READING:** Hebrews 2:1-2

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)*

#### **BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 4 CHRIST RULES AND RENEWS THE CHURCH**

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.*

## **REFLECTION**

Before he died, Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" His mission was complete. The victory was won. Jesus is now Lord and Messiah. He is the King of kings, the Ancient of Days, the Lamb who was slain and lives again. He is the Righteous One who makes many righteous. He is the Son of David, and of the increase of his government there will be no end.

He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith. His victory cannot be undone, his rule cannot be usurped, his Kingdom cannot be taken away. Jesus is Lord of his church, and he is the one who will return for his bride. Jesus, the Bridegroom is passionate about his bride. He wants a large bride, a pure bride, a bride with eyes only for him. And he will bring it about.

Jesus calls us to fix our eyes on him. We are to be like an athlete with eyes on the finish line. We are to be like Peter, with eyes on Jesus as he stepped out onto the waters of Lake Galilee and walked.

Storms will come as long as this world remains, and storms can take many different forms. But the answer to every storm we face is to look to the all-powerful Lord Jesus, who has power over them all. At Jesus' bidding we can do the impossible.

With our eyes on Jesus we will pray according to his will and see him answer in mighty ways. When our eyes are fixed on Jesus the things of this world that fight for our attention will lose their hold, and we will be transformed into his likeness.

We cannot change the world when we focus on the things we are afraid of. But Jesus has already won the battle against those things! It is finished. Fix your eyes on him and follow him with all your heart. Then you will see what he can do!

## **PRAYER**

*Lord Jesus, King of kings,*

*You are more powerful than all the things I fear. Teach me to fix my eyes on you and walk with faith. Help me to cast all my burdens on you in the sure knowledge that nothing is impossible for you.*

*Amen*

## DAY 7: PARAGRAPH 5 BASIS OF UNION

### JESUS CHRIST: GOD'S MESSAGE OF GRACE AND HOPE SEEN IN THE UNIQUE BIBLICAL WITNESSES

#### REV PROFESSOR EMERITUS JAMES HAIRE AC



Rev Professor Emeritus James Haire AC is Emeritus Professor of Theology, Charles Sturt University, Canberra, and Minister-in-Association, St. Paul's and Armitage Uniting Churches, Mackay, Queensland. He was the ninth President of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, from 2000 to 2003.

**BIBLE READING :** LUKE 24: 36 – 48

**KEY VERSES :** Luke 24:45-48 *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*

#### PARAGRAPH 5. THE BASIS OF UNION: THE BIBLICAL WITNESSES

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which she hears the Word of God and by which her faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom man's salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church. The Uniting Church lays upon her members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits her ministers to preach from these and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures. (1971)*

#### REFLECTION

The library of books which forms the Old and New Testaments is not a set of material which is intended primarily for humanity's religious search for God. From the point of view of most of the biblical witnesses, that would be similar to presenting these books as the mouse's search for the cat! The purpose of the biblical books is the other way round, as shown in this Paragraph 5 of the

*Basis of Union.* In this paragraph the Old and New Testaments first and foremost witness to God's relationship and interaction with humanity, culminating in the central fact that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5: 19).

The paragraph stresses a number of factors. First, the church universal receives this library of books as a gift and inheritance. The church cannot pick and choose from time to time which parts are more or less suitable to Christian existence. Second, these books are 'unique'. There is nothing else like them. Third, they are written by human hands, but their messages come from God. Sometimes those human writers are clumsy, but their central points are from God. Fourth, these messages are powerful and confronting, because they say to us what we as sinful and perverse human beings would frankly rather not hear. As perverse humans, we have an incredible ability to hear only what we want to hear, and to justify only what we want to acknowledge. However, these messages from God, through weak human hands, tell us what we need to hear, both for our everlasting safety and for our day-by-day living in God's grace and loving care. Fifth, these messages raise us up when we are distraught, fearful, lost and hopeless. Through Christ, God uses these messages to show us how to live in God's continuing and everlasting care.

Thus, as Christians, we need to seek to study and to understand these books and their messages as far as we are able, and, more than that, to be transformed as God in Christ renews us through the impact of their words. That is accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit as we, in weakness and humility, seek to face up to what God is saying to us through these books. In this way, our faith is 'nourished', as the paragraph says. However, not only that, but much more than that! For, through these biblical words our very lives are 'regulated', as the paragraph insists. This is not only for our personal faith. It is also for our shared faith as congregations. It is not only for our individual lives. It is for our lives together as congregations and as the church. So our very church life, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, needs primarily at all times to be 'regulated' by what we hear through this biblical witness.

## **PRAYER**

*Loving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we give you our inexpressible gratitude for the gift of abundant grace shown to us in Jesus Christ, witnessed to in the Bible. Help us to hear in its pages what we, as perverse human beings, would rather ignore, so that our faith may be strengthened and our lives regulated and controlled by your loving will for us. Amen.*

## DAY 8: PARAGRAPH 6 BASIS OF UNION

### GRACE and HOPE in CHRIST through WORDS and VISIBLE ACTS

#### DR. KATHERINE ABETZ



Dr Katherine Abetz lives at Poatina a Christian village in Tasmania. Her role as lay preacher raised the question of women's leadership in the church. This led her on a theological journey resulting in a doctorate of theology. She is an active member of the ACC and is an ACC School of Faith teacher.

#### BIBLE READING : TITUS 3:3-8

**KEY VERSES:** *Verses 5b-6 [NIV] He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

#### BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 6 - SACRAMENTS

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ himself acts in and through everything that the Church does in obedience to his commandment: it is Christ who by the gift of the Spirit confers the forgiveness, the fellowship, the new life and the freedom which the proclamation and actions promise; and it is Christ who awakens, purifies and advances in people the faith and hope in which alone such benefits can be accepted.*

#### REFLECTION

During my training as a religious education teacher in Victoria I was instructed about the different styles of learning. Some people learn primarily through what they see, some through what they hear and others through what they do. In spite of these emphases, most of us learn through a combination of all three avenues.

This paragraph from the Basis of Union has the heading 'Sacraments'. But at the beginning of the Basis we find the disclaimer that the headings were not part of the text approved by the three uniting churches. The paragraph itself

states that 'Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel *both* in words *and* in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper' (my italics). Long before I was taught about different styles of learning, the Church was commanded to employ them.

It is not through hearing alone but also through seeing and doing that we receive the good news.

But even the three avenues of learning are not enough on their own. Paragraph 6 is a link paragraph between paragraph 5 on the witness of the biblical writers in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church and paragraphs 7 and 8 which deal more specifically with baptism and the Lord's Supper. The link is Christ. Christ is in everything we hear and see and do. The Uniting Church's logo is a teaching device in this respect. We of the Uniting Church cannot miss the point. As Paul writes to Titus, the Holy Spirit is poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour. There are echoes of the sacraments in this Scriptural passage: the washing of rebirth (baptism) and the activity of pouring out (the outpoured blood). We listen; we see; we act out the story. And Christ is always there.

#### **PRAYER**

*Father, thank you so much for your kindness and love and for your generous pouring out of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Thank you for the grace which justifies us and the liberating hope of eternal life. May these things be expounded and also demonstrated in the worshipping and witnessing life of our Uniting Church.*

## DAY 9: PARAGRAPH 7 BASIS OF UNION

### THE JOY OF KNOWING WHOSE YOU ARE

#### REV WALTER ABETZ



Rev Walter Abetz retired from full time parish ministry in 2013. He is a foundation member of the ACC, and Secretary of the Resources and Development Committee of the Presbytery of Tasmania. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READINGS:** Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 4:13; Matthew 28: 19-20; 1 Corinthians 7:14

**KEY VERSE:** *“Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” Acts 2:38*

#### **BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 7 (1992) - BAPTISM**

(Bible verses in brackets added by Rev Walter Abetz)

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ incorporates people into his body by Baptism. [Rom 6:4] In this way he enables them to participate in his own baptism, which was accomplished once on behalf of all in his death and burial, and which was made available to all when, risen and ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. [Acts 2:38] Baptism into Christ’s body initiates people into Christ’s life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit. [1 Cor 12:13, 1 Pet 4:13] The Uniting Church will baptize those who confess the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility. [Mt 28:19-20, 1 Cor 7:14]*

## REFLECTION

Baptism is a sacrament – a making holy, a setting apart which was ordained by Christ. It is not the invention of unredeemed human beings. In fact, unredeemed humans find baptism offensive or foolish.

In the ancient world Christian Baptism signified a transfer of allegiance from one authority to another. When Christians at their baptism proclaimed that Jesus was Lord (and not Caesar), it was a dangerous counter-cultural political act, as well as a matter of religious commitment to follow Jesus, to take on his identity, and being prepared to suffer the consequences.

In today's world of individualistic aggressive self-definition, baptism is a grotesque ritual. It is intensely counter-cultural. People presenting for baptism renounce self-definition, and begin to find their identity in Christ, the Son of God, the pioneer and perfecter of *our* faith (note the plural, "our faith" – the faith once for all delivered to the saints), not an individualised spirituality that caters to my personal needs and my self-indulgence. There is no room for that. God's grace is sufficient for us.

In a world groaning for the day of redemption, a world torn by evil and strife, if we are to have a redemptive influence through being the Body of Christ, then we have to be prepared for suffering. Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

Humans are created in God's image, but many refuse to live as image bearers. Through baptism we are adopted into God's family, to learn God's ways. Our identity is tied to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We are God's creatures and there is joy in accepting our identity that we have from God. Baptism is the formal beginning of that journey into becoming who we are, just as a wedding is the formal beginning of a life-long relationship. It is the formal change of status before God.

## PRAYER

*Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Father Son and Holy Spirit, increase in us the joy of belonging to you, the joy of being shaped by you. Father, it is our desire to be conformed to the image of your Son, through your Spirit at work in us. May we encourage one another through our steadfastness in trials and our delight in good works done in your name, that the world may know and worship you. In the name of Christ, our Redeemer, we ask this. Amen*

## DAY 10 : PARAGRAPH 8 BASIS OF UNION

### TRUE INTIMACY

#### REV JONATHAN BUTTON



Rev Jonathan Button is Minister in Placement at Golden Grove Uniting Church, South Australia.

**BIBLE READING:** 1Corinthians 11: 23-26

**KEY VERSE:** *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* 1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV)

#### PARAGRAPH 8: BASIS OF UNION - HOLY COMMUNION (1971)

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ signifies and seals his continuing presence with his people in the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion, constantly repeated in the life of the Church. In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptized people on their way to the final inheritance of the Kingdom. Thus the people of God, through faith and the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, have communion with their Saviour, make their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaim the Lord's death, grow together into Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which he will bring to consummation.*

#### REFLECTION

Martin Luther called the sacraments *visible Words*. He was echoing St Augustine here. The Sacraments are the *Word of God* – the Gospel, *made visible* – so that you can touch and taste it. When He instituted Holy Communion at His last supper, He said, *this broken bread is my body broken in death for all*, and, *this wine is my blood shed for all*. The bread and wine “speak” the truth of His saving, healing, redeeming death for the world, for us.

Just as the Word of God is actually *God Himself present, living, active, powerful, effective* (Is 55:11; Jer 23:29), likewise in its *visible form* in Holy Communion,

Jesus Christ Himself is present, active, doing afresh in our lives what His Word is declaring in the bread/body, and wine/blood. In the bread and wine, Jesus Christ is there as flesh and blood, walks among us, caresses our cheek, kisses us, and puts His life within us as we eat and drink.

In Holy Communion, Christ ministers to us in “*real time*” His *abundant grace*, in which is contained the fullness of our *liberating hope*. This shows all of us *our profound need of His grace* – i.e., our sin and helplessness, and also at once *the gift of Christ’s abundant supply of grace*. His abundant grace forgives us, and liberates us *from* all our sin and brokenness, and frees us *into* a new life of loving, and living for God and His good will - embracing His truth, and loving all people – holding out to them the same grace that we have received. In Holy Communion, we come to Christ empty – as we always are!; and He who has received all fullness from the Father is there, *and fills us with Himself to overflowing!*

## **PRAYER**

*Dear Father, we are always needy. We thank you that our true Lord and Shepherd, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead forever, promises to be continually with us, and feeds, nourishes and refreshes us, meets all of our need here and now, and brings us into the new heaven and the new earth. There we will taste and enjoy the fullness of the feast of His abundant grace, promised in the rich foretaste of it in Holy Communion.*

## DAY 11: PARAGRAPH 9 BASIS OF UNION

### OUR HOPE: SAFEGUARDING OUR FAITH IN CHRIST THROUGH CONFESSING THE CREEDS

REV DAVID KOWALICK



**Rev. David Kowalick**

David is the minister in placement at the Walkerville Uniting Church. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

(1 Corinthians 15: 2-4)

#### PARAGRAPH 9: THE CREEDS (1971)

*The Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by her use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. She receives these as authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith, framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days, to declare and to guard the right understanding of that faith. She commits her ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age. She commends to ministers and congregations their use for instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity.*

#### REFLECTION

In paragraph (9) the Basis of Union acknowledges that our unity, and thus our right to be considered part of the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church” (see paragraph 2), demands that we hold to the confessions of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. The Basis of Union accepts that the creeds have been, and continue to be, one of the means by which the church can “declare and guard the right understanding of [the] faith.” (paragraph 9). If there has ever been a

moment when UCA has needed the guardianship afforded to us by the creeds, then that moment is right now.

The Creeds bear faithful witness to Christ because they follow the same trajectory and lineage of the gracious revelation of truth that began with the witness of the Old Testament foreshadowing the ultimate revelation of God in the incarnation of the Son of God - Jesus Christ - followed by the eye witness testimony of the Apostles in the New Testament. There is an observable lineage from Paul's articulation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-3 to the creeds. Concerning this passage Scot McKnight writes, "[1 Corinthians 15: 1-3] is the genesis of the great Christian creeds... One can say with accuracy that the Nicene Creed is an exegesis or exposition of the gospel tradition of Paul's in 1 Corinthians 15." <sup>1</sup> Thus, the Apostles' and Nicene creeds stand together with the scriptures to hold the Church to its original course.

Accordingly, paragraph (9) begins with the words, "the Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by its use of the confessions..." (paragraph 9). Thus, authentic unity can only exist when it is founded on truth. Unity is the fruit of the truth; not the cause of it. Without truth our so-called unity is fated to fail. Pray that the Uniting Church does not give up its proper place within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and that it will maintain its unity in the faith as articulated in the creeds.

## **PRAYER**

*Almighty Father, we pray for the Uniting Church, that she will remain faithful to her calling within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and that the Creeds will inform its councils and its members of the basis of that unity, and that the church will not be overcome by the desire to merely appease the culture. May your Holy Spirit draw attention to the lordship of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Mc Knight, Scott. *The King Jesus Gospel*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids. 2011

## DAY 12: PARAGRAPH 10 BASIS OF UNION

### THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST AND THE NEED TO CONSTANTLY APPEAL TO SCRIPTURE

REV DR ROBERT BRENNAN



Rev Dr Robert Brennan is the Training Manager of Wontulp-Bi-Buya (Wontulp-Bi-Buya College is to support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander church and community leaders through study programs leading to awards in theology, suicide prevention, addictions management & community development.) He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

#### PARAGRAPH 10 BASIS OF UNION: REFORMATION WITNESSES (1971)

*The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of reformation fathers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner she will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). She will commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.*

**BIBLE READING:** Psalm 32:8-11

**KEY VERSE:** *The LORD says, "I will teach you the way you should go; I will instruct you and advise you. (Psalm 32:8)*

#### REFLECTION

As I write this I am marking student's assessments on Reformation history. The enthusiasm of both the students and the teacher working through this unit is exciting. The issue for many Indigenous peoples around the world is not so much figuring out how European culture works but how it can even possibly work. Those of us who grow up in it are as blind to our cultural quirks as a fish is to water. For example how many of us realise that we enjoy our priceless

freedom only because sometime and somewhere a government used absolute authority to say we can be free?

This class' eagerness came from beginning to understand how and why dominant culture (and the church) developed. They were beginning to see western history through their own cultural lenses. That is important. Brad Gregory's *Unintended Reformation* argues that the influences of the Reformation period on contemporary society, both intended and unplanned are more profound than we realise. We often see this period as dry and dusty and the Reformation witnesses as leathery old meat too tough for even a dingo to chew on. But they are not! The key is this. Their authors were trying to address seismic changes in their own cultures and societies. What were the issues that they were trying to address? What solutions did they apply? Finally, how did that work out? – Well? Badly? or Unexpectedly? Those questions are ones we face still even though the issues are different.

Did the Reformers know what the best answers would be? Of course not! What each of these Reformation statements actually do, is to call us back to the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the need to constantly appeal to Scripture. This was especially when Scripture seems to say little or nothing about the changes they faced! The future is indeed an undiscovered country as Star Trek misquotes Hamlet. Our hope in Christ is that we have a sure guide for whatever the future brings. Our promise is that God's grace will carry us beyond the faltering missteps we make. Can we be sure? If the last 500 years is anything to go by, Western civilisation has realised that hope and grace more often than not and somehow blundered past fatal and even apocalyptic mistakes. Somehow, it yet still stands. Surely the Reformer's encouragement to look to Christ and appeal to Scripture is still worth pursuing in our own period of seismic changes in values, ethics, technology, society and the environment.

**Prayer:**

*Father we face an uncertain future where many voices and emotions call to us seeking to guide our choices and directions. Act by your Holy Spirit to enable our spirits to trust in Christ and remember the centrality of his person and work when we have no idea how to solve the problems that face us. Increase our faith that we will constantly appeal to Scripture to guide us through the unknown future, especially in those times when the direction it points seems very different to the obvious paths. Let our hope in you Father and in your word be graciously realised in spite of our many failings and mistakes.*

*Amen.*

## DAY 13: PARAGRAPH 11 BASIS OF UNION

**GRACE to confess our LORD in FRESH WORDS and DEEDS.**

**DR. KATHERINE ABETZ**



Dr Katherine Abetz lives at Poatina a Christian village in Tasmania. Her role as lay preacher raised the question of women's leadership in the church. This led her on a theological journey resulting in a doctorate of theology. She is an active member of the ACC and is an ACC School of Faith teacher

**BIBLE READING:** MATTHEW 10: 16-20

**KEY VERSE:** *Verse 16 Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

### **BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 11: SCHOLARLY INTERPRETERS (1971)**

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left his Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, his living Word. In particular she enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and thanks God for the knowledge of his ways with men which are open to an informed faith. She lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which she will learn to sharpen her understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. Within that fellowship she also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help her to understand her own nature and mission. She thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. She prays that she may be ready when occasion demands to confess her Lord in fresh words and deeds.*

### **REFLECTION**

This paragraph takes me back to 2005, to a conference on the Basis of Union with the congregation at Kyabram, Victoria led by a group of ministers from what was then EMU and the Reforming Alliance. The conference was videoed and a shorter version produced on paragraphs 5 and 11. Some of the faces in

the video would be familiar to ACC members although the speakers look somewhat younger than they do now.

The conference offered an opportunity to examine paragraph 11 in depth. To quote Max Champion:

*... there are times we will need to listen [to other cultures], certainly at a time when Western Protestantism, in particular, is collapsing ... I hadn't read [the paragraph] as carefully ever before but it seems to me it's very careful not to say: go along with whatever happens to be popular. It's saying clearly: be in contact, know what you're dealing with, speak to people, don't step aside from the scholarly discussions that are going on, don't put yourself in a ghetto. But the contact is: help her for her mission, help her to confess the faith, and then it mentions prophets and of all things (we go over this bit) martyrs!*



The world may supply questions, even perhaps insights. The faith of the world-wide church frames the discussion. 'Help her to confess the faith', says Max Champion. Strictly, the language of the paragraph is: 'confess her Lord'. The language of 'she' for the Church (in the original wording of the Basis) is the language of intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. As he says in Luke 10:19-20: 'When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you'.

What are we to do in this hour when Western Protestantism is running out of answers? With a wealth of zoological metaphor, our Lord supplies the answer. 'I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,' he says, 'so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' Our evangelists, our scholars, our prophets, our martyrs are sent out beyond the 'safe' places. We are to be wise. We are to be faithful. We are to recognize that we are not the only sheep in the fold. Above all, we are to pray that we 'may be ready when occasion demands to confess [our] Lord in fresh words and deeds'.

## **PRAYER**

*Father, when Western Protestantism is running out of answers, help us to find the answer in the Lord Jesus. When Western Protestantism tries to be 'inclusive' but denies the gender inclusive dimension of the term 'men', help us to find our unity in the Lord Jesus. Help us all, individually and communally, to live and work within a world-wide fellowship of Churches and, in that context, be ready to confess our Lord in fresh words and deeds.*

## DAY 14. PARAGRAPH 12

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELONG? MEMBERSHIP AND THE UCA

#### REV ANNE HIBBARD



Rev Anne Hibbard is a Minister of the Word from the Central Coast NSW. She is the national coordinator of the ACC Prayer Network and the national director of Uniting Prayer and Fasting. She is also a long-term member of the ACC National Council. She is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READING:** Matthew 28:16-20

**KEY VERSE: Matthew 28:18-20a (NIV)** *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” 19-20a*

#### PARAGRAPH 12 BASIS OF UNION (1971) - MEMBERS (1971)

*The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as her members all who are recognized as members of the uniting Churches at the time of union. Thereafter membership is open to all who are baptized into the Holy Catholic Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Uniting Church will seek ways in which the baptized may have confirmed to them the promises of God, and be led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptized. To this end she commits herself to undertake, with other Christians, to explore and develop the relation of baptism to confirmation and to participation in the Holy Communion.*

#### REFLECTION

When I buy something at the shops, I’m asked by almost every franchise “Are you a member? It’s free and easy to join”. Membership gives you some quirks and maybe a small financial benefit but in terms of a sense of belonging they have little value. When membership includes everyone, membership means nothing. In my life I’ve been part of different organisations, groups and communities. The ones I’ve discovered have the most significance are not the ones that are the easiest to join but the ones that have parameters and have a process of belonging that might take a while to go through – eg sporting teams

and religious orders. It is the groups who define membership that have a strong corporate identity and a common sense of purpose.

The Uniting Church of Australia in the Basis of Union paragraph 12 states clearly who the members are to be. Firstly the 1971 edition reminds us that the Uniting Church isn't an organization but rather is the bride of Christ. It says that the UCA "accepts and recognizes" as "her" (rather than "its") members certain people. To be a member is to belong to something organic and alive connected intimately with Christ, not just another club.

Secondly, membership is open not to everyone, but to those who have been "baptized into the Holy Catholic Church" in "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This reminds us that we as the UCA can't decide what membership is on our own. We are part of the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Since the church began, baptism was seen as a sign of initiation into the church in the name of the Triune God. Such baptism was encouraged by Jesus himself as an important step in making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

But what of children baptized as infants who do not profess faith in Christ? The BOU tells us that we as the UCA will keep seeking "the promises of God" being confirmed for the baptized. This is so that they may be "led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptized". Confirmation isn't a path of process but rather Christian Discipleship. In an effort to be inclusive some parts of the UCA have cheapened membership to be all those who attend anything related to the church. This forgets that the UCA is only a part of the whole of the Christian church. If we want to continue to belong to the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church it is necessary for us to challenge mottos such as "All of This is us". Belonging as members in the UCA is not defined in the BOU by expansive inclusion, but by baptism, confirmation and Christian discipleship.

## **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus Christ's command for us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that he commanded. Help us be faithful to this calling in the Uniting Church. By your grace teach us afresh what it means to be a member of the UCA and also a part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Protect us from cheapening membership and empower us to cherish and to continue to explore the gifts of baptism, confirmation and Christian discipleship for your glory. In Jesus mighty name. Amen.*

## DAY 15 PARAGRAPH 13

### CONFESSING CHRIST AND BEING CHRIST'S FAITHFUL SERVANT: A HOPE AND CALL FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE CHURCH



Rev. Rod James is a retired UC minister of the Word in South Australia. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READING:** Matthew 16:21-25 (ESV)

**KEY VERSE:** *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24*

#### **BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH: 13. GIFTS AND MINISTRIES (1971)**

*The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. She acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of his Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ. The Uniting Church, at the time of union, will recognize and accept the ministries of those who have been called to any task or responsibility in the uniting Churches. The Uniting Church will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order her life in response to his call to enter more fully into her mission.*

#### **REFLECTION:**

The key to this paragraph lies in the words, 'engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant'. Three times the BOU refers to Christ as the crucified one, and in particular, in Para 3, as 'the risen crucified one'. In his Heidelberg disputation, some 500 years ago, Martin Luther spoke of a theology of the cross and a theology of glory. By a theology of glory, Luther meant having a belief that focusses on human ability, achievement and triumph as God's image creatures.

In his Heidelberg Disputation Luther wrote, "*Because people do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory [and] power*".

Theologians of the cross, by contrast, base their faith on God's revelation of Himself in Christ crucified. A theology of the cross, like Jesus' crucifixion, always stands in stark contrast to the attitudes and aspirations of human culture. Love and suffering are contrasted with self-interest and prosperity. Luther again:

*"The love of God which lives in a person loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise and strong...This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which . . . confers good upon the bad and needy."*

While we do live in the power of the resurrection and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the reality is that, even today, Jesus continues to be rejected and crucified in his body of believers. Through them he is still taking the way of the cross by living among the poor, bearing the burdens of the sick, disabled and dispossessed, and speaking courageously against evil powers in the world. Another theologian, Karl Trueman, says,

*As Christ demonstrated his kingship and power by death on the cross, so the believer does so by giving himself or herself unconditionally to the aid of others. We are to be, as Luther puts it, little Christs to our neighbours, for in so doing we find our true identity as children of God.*

Paragraph 13 recognises that it is the Holy Spirit, by taking what belongs to 'the risen crucified one' and revealing it, who 'endows 'members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts'. And in a theology of the cross, 'there is no gift without its corresponding service', i.e. service that involves self-sacrifice and sometimes suffering.

*Elders, for example, are not to be those renowned for throwing their weight around, for badgering others, and for using their position or wealth or credentials to enforce their own opinions. No, the truly Christian elder is the one who devotes his whole life to the painful, inconvenient, and humiliating service of others, for in so doing he demonstrates Christlike authority, the kind of authority that Christ himself demonstrated throughout his incarnate life and supremely on the cross at Calvary.*  
(Trueman)

#### **PRAYER:**

*Lord Jesus, thank you for the privilege of being, by faith, your own body upon the earth. Risen crucified One, may your Holy Spirit so dwell in us that we may be as 'little Christs to our neighbours'. We thank you that, even though it involves sacrifice and suffering, your service is perfect freedom.*

## DAY 16: BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 14

### ORDINATION

#### REV WALTER ABETZ



Rev Walter Abetz retired from full time parish ministry in 2013. He is a foundation member of the ACC, and Secretary of the Resources and Development Committee of the Presbytery of Tasmania. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READINGS:** Acts 13:2; 1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 5:29; Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28 (cf Eph 4:11-13); Jude 3-4; Romans 1:5; 1 Cor 4:9

**KEY VERSE :** *While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2*

#### BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 14

#### MINISTERS, ELDERS, DEACONESSES AND LAY PREACHERS (1971)

*The Uniting Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognise among her members men and women called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world. To this end: (no bold type in the original)*

*(a) The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as ministers of the Word all who ... adhere to the Basis of Union. This adherence and acceptance may take place at the time of union **or at a later date**. Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, she is assured that God, who has never left himself without witness to that Word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word. These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus **maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church**. Such members will be called Ministers and their setting apart will be known as Ordination. The Presbytery will ordain by prayer and the laying on of hands in the presence of a worshipping congregation. In this act of ordination the Church praises the ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men. She recognises his call of the individual to be his minister; she prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip him for that service. By the participation in the act of ordination of those already ordained, the Church bears witness to God's faithfulness and declares the hope by which she lives. In company with other Christians the Uniting Church will seek for a renewed understanding of the way in which the congregation participates in ordination and of the significance of ordination in the life of the Church.*

*(b) (Office of Elders) (c) (Office of Deacon). (d) (Office of lay preacher)*

## REFLECTION

As the early church grew, it needed an administrative structure. When an administrative structure does not reflect the organic structure of an organisation, it leads to trouble, especially in times of stress within the organisation. The Church is no exception.

Our Uniting Church is currently suffering from this problem. From an organic or functional perspective there should be apostles, prophets and teachers, etc. But we have ministers who “will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church.” Our Uniting Church ministers attending the National Assembly seems to me to be failing in their apostolic witness. The lay people have some excuse, perhaps. Perhaps we are asking too much of Ministers in being preachers, administrators of the sacraments, teachers, pastors and administrators of parishes, doers of good works, etc.

I found it salutary that Barnabas, Andronicus and Junias, not of the Twelve, are named as Apostle in Acts and Romans. Therefore Apostleship has not terminated with the death of John. God has given, and continues to give, gifts to the church. Has the National Assembly somehow refused to receive these gifts? Have we allowed the words of our present day prophets and present day apostles, not formally recognised, to be ignored? The Letter of Jude has some haunting words for the Uniting Church, and for us. In our age of deconstruction of God’s commandments and reconstructed self-definitions, we need to hear the words of the prophets and apostles. Otherwise the weight of the world’s opinion will lead us astray, as it has done to the Doctrine Working Group of the National Assembly, populated by Ministers of the Word and theological teachers who should know better. Let us pray for our Uniting Church that more of our Ministers of the Word will stand tall in godly humility, to exercise the gift of the Holy Spirit, as apostles and prophets, “to constantly correct what is erroneous” in our life – whatever the cost may be. God is gracious and we live in hope of the promised end, as a pilgrim people.

### Prayer

*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we grieve at the stance of the Assembly Standing Committee of your Uniting Church. We confess that we, individually, have been slow to speak up, partly out of respect for our leaders, partly out of an ungodly fear of ridicule, partly out of disbelief that our leaders could actually want to break away from the unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. We pray for all office bearers in the church, lay preachers, deacons, elders and church councillors, and ministers, that they will open themselves up to the guidance of your Holy Spirit and fulfil the tasks assigned to them by your Holy Spirit, that the apostolic witness may be maintained in the Uniting Church and elsewhere in your Kingdom. In the name of Christ, the Head of the Church. Amen*

## **DAY 17: PARAGRAPH 15 CHRIST ALONE IS SUPREME**

### **UNITED BY MUTUAL SUBMISSION IN THE SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL**

#### **REV TREVOR FAGGOTTER**



Rev Trevor Faggotter is a Minister of Word in Placement at Claire Uniting Church, rural South Australia

**BIBLE READING:** 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

**KEY VERS:** *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ* 1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV)

#### ***BASIS OF UNION PARAGRAPH 15: GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH (1971)***

*The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises her life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of his Church. The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world. The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to her through any of her councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey his will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel..*

#### **REFLECTION**

This paragraph in the *Basis of Union* flows out of an understanding of our being in union with Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, and of our participation, by faith, in the very life and action of the Trinity. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another, so too, the members of Christ's body are to mutually indwell one another. Paul illustrates this in 1Corinthians 12 where he says that the "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you". For the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And the

body is arranged in this life of mutual dependency, and mutually indwelling, so that members may care for one another, and that there be no division in the body. Jesus taught us to welcome children, to honour the elderly, and to listen to and encourage 'the least'.

It is crucial within the life of the church that even the Assembly, which is responsible for doctrine, not act alone, as a council of the church, but rather it is to recognise the limits of its own authority, and it must 'give heed to other councils of the Church'. There is an important reason for this: 'so that the whole body of believers may be united' – not divided – 'by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel' (says the *Basis*).

Not only that, *Basis of Union* say that it is in fact the Congregation—not the Assembly—that is the **embodiment** in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ.

Now, of the Assembly, that *Basis says, that* 'it has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church'.

Assembly needs to act in ways that assist, not damage, 'the wider union of the Church'. And here is the rub, 'It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. **It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church.**

The seeking of concurrence 'with other councils'—Synod and Presbyteries—'and on occasion of the congregations', is to be done on matters of vital importance to the life of the church. This has never been done, since inception in 1977. However, it is undoubtedly true of the doctrine of marriage, that it is a matter vital to the life of the church. Not to seek concurrence in any change, would really be to trample upon the membership of congregations, and it would be a recipe not for mutual submission, but for division, due to a high handed power-grab, and a politicised action, that is against the ethos of the Uniting church.

## **PRAYER**

*We pray, O Lord Jesus Christ, that your supremacy may be honoured, and that the 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly will recognise the limits of its own authority, and 'give heed' to the other councils of the church, in which the congregations are primary.*

## DAY 18: PARAGRAPH 16

### FATHERLY CARE

#### REV ANNE HIBBARD



Rev Anne Hibbard is a Minister of the Word from the Northern part of the Central Coast NSW. She is the national coordinator of the ACC Prayer Network and the national director of Uniting Prayer and Fasting. She is also a long term member of the ACC National Council. She is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READING:** 1 John 3:1-3; 1 John 4:9-11; Romans 5:1-5

**KEY VERSE:** *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! 1 John 3:*

#### **BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 16 PARTICULAR FUNCTIONS (1971)**

*The Uniting Church recognises the responsibility and freedom which belong to councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfillment of particular functions. She sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals with men (people 1992) personally: he would have his fatherly care known among men (people 1992); he would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant.*

#### **REFLECTION**

This beautiful phrase “fatherly care” is in the original 1971 version of the BOU. The 1992 version “God’s loving care” doesn’t quite capture the amazing gift that we have been given that we can now share with others. That gift of abounding grace is the Father’s love. 1 John 3:1 says “*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*”

Jesus taught us to call God “Father”, “Abba”, “Daddy” (Matthew 6:9). For many this is incredibly difficult. I too went through a season when I could not call God “Father” in a time when I was processing what happened to me as a small child. However later I have also had the incredible joy through Jesus Christ, of finding God as my father, and bringing to wholeness, that which was missing in

my early years. God truly does deal with people personally in the depths of their being.

Every child needs a loving father and a loving mother. The good news is if you missed out, our heavenly Father can fill that gap and even more. That is the love and grace that we have to share with people as a church. It's not our own love. We love only because he first loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. (1 John 4:10) We discover that love, by a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. We discover not a concept but a relationship. Jesus opens the way for us to find deep rest and safety in the welcoming arms of God our caring Father. We all need to find God as Father whether we grew up well or not. It is God's love that the world is thirsty for. It is God's love our church is thirsty for. The deeper we experience it the more we can lay down our lives as servants and together offer this abundant grace to the world in fresh word, deed and sign.

## **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, what a joy we have to be able to call you daddy. Thank you that through Christ's sacrifice those who believe now have the power to become your children. Thank you that you have changed our hearts of stone by pouring your love into them so that your fatherly care permeates every part of us. Teach us as the Uniting Church in Australia that in our own strength we have little capacity to care for this world and make a difference in people's lives. Reveal to us that it is when we receive your love in Christ; we are given power through the Holy Spirit to truly love and care for others, not just as individuals but also as the church. Thank you for choosing us, as the body of Christ to make your fatherly care truly become known among people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

## DAY 19 PARAGRAPH 17

### LAW IN THE CHURCH

#### REV IAN WEEKS



Rev Ian Weeks is the minister in placement at Belrose Uniting Church, Sydney NSW. He is also on the ACC National Council serving as the secretary. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READING:** Psalm 19; Deuteronomy 4:1 – 8; Romans 5:18 – 21

**KEY VERSE:** *The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul  
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. Psalm 19:7*

#### **BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 17 LAW IN THE CHURCH (1971)**

*The Uniting Church acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of her law. The aim of such law is to confess God's will for the life of his Church; but since law is received by man and framed by him, it is always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel. The Uniting Church will keep her law under constant review so that her life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and man, and her worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of mankind under God's sovereign grace.*

#### **REFLECTION**

In Psalm 19 we are invited to join with the Psalmist in celebrating the greatness of God not only in His creative works, but also in God's gracious provision of His good, pure, righteousness and beneficial Law.

*The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

*The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*

*The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.*

*The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. (Psalm 19: 7 – 9 NIV)*

Laws, in theory, are good. They are there for the protection and well being of the community. God gave the Law in the Old Testament for the good of His people, that may live well in the land God had given them, and be a beacon of light, wisdom and blessing to the world around them (Deuteronomy 4).

Any community needs laws – laws that provide good order, protection, justice and guidance – because we are still sinful people. The Church is no different. The Basis of Union (Para 17) acknowledges that the Church needs laws to help us live out the Gospel in obedience to the ultimate Law of Christ: love God and love your neighbour: *“to confess God’s will for the Church”, and “that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ.”*

But laws have limits. No matter how good the laws may be, they cannot change us, reform us, or redeem us. They remind us of our brokenness. They point us to our need for a law-abider, a law-fulfiller, someone who can rescue us from the consequences of our transgressions of the laws. As the Basis of Union states *“The law of the Church ... will look to the final reconciliation of humanity under God’s sovereign grace.”* (Para 17).

God, in His sovereign and abundant grace has given us a Saviour – Jesus – who has fulfilled all law with righteousness, and has taken the consequence of our law-breaking upon himself by death upon the cross. As a result, Jesus has freed us from the curse and bondage of law, and given us a hope of an eternal freedom from all laws in His kingdom, where laws will not be needed for us to live out our redemption. *Abundant Grace, Liberating Hope!*

In the mean-time, we pray that we will live in obedience to the laws of the Lord, and of the Church, that we too may live well in the land God had given us, and be a beacon of light, wisdom and blessing to the world around us.

## **PRAYER**

*Almighty God, loving Heavenly Father, giver of all good law: Forgive my transgressions of the good laws that you have given and the laws you have helped the Church form. Enable me, by Your Spirit, to live a life worthy of the Gospel by keeping the laws of the Church that direct my witness, worship and service. And help me keep my eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, who has fulfilled all righteousness for me, that I too may perfectly love You, love my neighbours, and be a beacon of abundant grace and liberating hope in my community. I ask this in Jesus’ name and for His glory. Amen.*

## DAY 20 PARAGRAPH 18

### PEOPLE OF GOD ON THE WAY?

#### DR DAVID POHLMANN



Dr David Pohlmann has post-graduate qualifications in human behaviour, ministry, education, and chaplaincy. He is currently the minister in placement at Mt Louisa House of Praise in Townsville. He is a Teacher of the ACC School of Faith.

**BIBLE READINGS:** Hebrews 4:12; Hebrews 12:5-11; James 5:19-20

**KEY VERSES:** *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."* Hebrews 12:5-6 (NIV)

#### **BASIS OF UNION: PARAGRAPH 18 PEOPLE OF GOD ON THE WAY (1971)**

*The Uniting Church affirms that she belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. She prays God that, through the gift of the Spirit, he will constantly correct that which is erroneous in her life, will bring her into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use her worship, witness and service to his eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

Jesus Christ has been walking alongside of us as a church for this past 41 years, and of course for so much longer through our predecessor churches. I can imagine there have been many times he has been tempted to leave us to our own devices rather than demonstrating his abundant Grace time and time again...the grace that draws us back to his liberating hope. In our Basis of Union we pray "that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, ...and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen. We are indeed the people of God on the way.

God has a way of cutting through the rubbish in our lives and getting to the heart of a matter.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it like this: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of

soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb 4:12, ESV). God speaks in this way, not to slap us down when we get things wrong, but to give us another go...an act of spacious grace! He frees us to begin again, with a sense of rekindled hope. The author of the book of Hebrews (12:5-11), reminds us again that such correction and exhortation emanates from the parental relationship God has with us...His children on the Way. **Not** to face this correction along the way, *may even* make us question our parentage...but to be corrected is to be loved.

In his letter, James reminds us that while on that way “if anyone among [us] wanders from the truth and [one of us] brings him [or her] back, let [them] know that whoever brings back a sinner from ...wandering will save [their] soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” James 5:19-20, ESV. Such correction is also an act of love. Perhaps such loving correction comes through the inter-related councils of the church, as they seek to discern what the Spirit is saying about what is right and what is erroneous in the Church’s life?

**Prayer:**

*Gracious God and Father*

*We acknowledge that we have not always travelled your way. And yet you remain with us on the journey. We repent of the times when we have gotten it wrong, and we thank you for your abundant grace and faithfulness to us. Help us to remember that you Lord, discipline the ones who love. Thank you for treating us as your children – help us to hear your voice. Free us from the bondage of sin and give us the strength to heed your voice with the hope that we shall live. For Christ’s sake, Amen.*

**ALL-AGE LEARNING AND BIBLE STUDY OPTIONS**  
**in dialogue with the *Basis of Union* and the Uniting Church logo**  
compiled by Dr Katherine Abetz



**The Uniting Church emblem represents:\***

“The Cross of Jesus Christ, in its light and love stands over a darkened world -redeeming it through grace and truth.”

“By that cross his people in heaven and earth are bound to Him and to each other.”

The Holy Spirit, symbolised by the dove with the wings of flame, empowers and guides us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

“The wide ‘U’ at the bottom of the emblem points to the fact that we are uniting. As a semi-circle it reminds us also that the renewing of both church and world are as yet incomplete.”

The emblem symbolises “something of the vision”, reminding people of the gospel’s centrality in church people’s work and “the need for constant reform and renewal” as well as commitment to worship, witness and service.

See also <http://cawdoruniting.unitingchurch.org.au/?logo>

\* Description of the Uniting Church emblem in the diary supplied by UCA funds management 2012. A similar description appears on the UCA Assembly web-site but some parts of the description are omitted, added or rephrased.

## **ALL-AGE LEARNING OPTIONS**

### **General responses to the Uniting Church logo and/or Basis of Union**

#### 1. Illustration Challenge!

Draw a picture to illustrate key words and phrases from the Basis of Union. Send your pictures to us. We hope eventually to produce an illustrated version of the Basis.

#### 2. Mix and match

Compare paragraphs of the Basis of Union with the meaning of the Uniting Church logo. You may wish to cut out the separate elements of the logo (see worksheet A) and attach to key phrases in the paragraphs.

#### 3. Colour in the Uniting Church logo (see worksheet B).

Colour in and explain in your own words what is meant by the different elements of the logo. (You may wish to do this in pairs.) Coloured in logos could contribute to other activities, e.g. the logo pasted onto 'bricks' in the 'Build our church!' option.

#### 4. Liturgical Dance

Perform a liturgical dance based on the Uniting Church logo. Place it on Youtube. Send the link to us and to the Assembly and your Presbytery.

### **Responses related to specific paragraphs or groups of paragraphs**

Paragraph 1:

- Interview

Talk with someone who remembers the inauguration of the Uniting Church.

Paragraph 2:

- Unity-in-diversity

Have a church lunch or dinner with different foods to represent different cultures. Follow this with a celebration of the Lord's Supper to 'bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries'.

Paragraph 3;4:

- Build our church!

Cover small to medium boxes with butcher's paper. Write key words or phrases from the paragraphs on the facing side. Build the walls of the church. Folded cardboard could supply the roof.

Paragraphs 5;6;7;8:

- A lamp to the feet

Put tea-light candles in bottles. Arrange in the outline of a cross. Place the Christ candle in the centre. Include symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The tea-lights symbolise the biblical witnesses. Light the candles. Take it in turns to reflectively walk the lighted cross. This activity could take place outside.

Paragraphs 9;10;11:

- Hanging Mobile 1

Make a mobile showing the relationship between the Holy Trinity, Scripture, the Creeds and Confessions of the wider Church and also the Basis of Union. Where would you place 'a world-wide fellowship of Churches'; 'contact with contemporary thought'; 'continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr'? You may wish to hang some things vertically, pointing upwards to symbolise the witness to Christ.

Paragraphs 12;13;14:

- Ministry walk

Pick out key words or phrases from these paragraphs. Write them on sheets and arrange them on the floor. Take it in turns to consider these aspects of membership and ministry. What does your confirmation of baptism mean to you? Where do you fit in the ministry of Christ?

Paragraphs 15;16;17:

- Hanging Mobile 2

Make a mobile showing the relationship between the various councils of the Uniting Church. Who is supreme? Pick out key words or phrases from the paragraphs to describe the attitudes to be displayed in the government of the Uniting Church.

Paragraph 18:

1. The Uniting Church prayer

Use this paragraph as a basis for prayer. You may wish to set the prayer to music.

**Bible Study in dialogue with  
the *Basis of Union* and the Uniting Church logo**

**Paragraph 1:**

Readings:

Matthew 28:16-20; Revelation 11:15-19 and 19:6-9; 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 17.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to 'remain open to constant reform under his [Christ's] word'?

Daniel Migliore writes: 'In a Reformed understanding of confessions, they possess a real but relative and provisional authority in the life of the church. The principle 'always in need of reform' (*semper reformanda*) must apply also to the church's confessional statements if the scriptural witness is to remain normative in the proclamation and life of the church'. *Faith Seeking Understanding: And Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 61.)

2. This is a transition paragraph from language about the three uniting churches to the Uniting Church. The language of 'they' for the uniting churches becomes 'she' for the Uniting Church in the other paragraphs (in the original version of the Basis). In paragraph 1 the 'Church of God' is called 'she'. What does this imply? Does it make a difference if the Church of God is called 'it' (as in the Assembly Standing Committee's 1992 version)?
3. What does it mean to 'go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ'? How does this relate to the Uniting Church logo? Where does the commission to make 'disciples of all nations' fit in?

**Paragraph 2:**

Readings:

Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:20-21; Galatians 3: 27-28; Colossians 3: 9-11; John 17.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be one in Christ? Is there a place for diversity in the church?
2. What does it mean to 'live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church'?

3. What are the implications of the unfinished circle of the Uniting Church logo at the local, regional, national and international levels?

**Paragraph 3:**

Readings:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 11: 13-16; 12: 18-24; 13:14.

Questions:

1. Where does the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church come from? Does the Uniting Church logo reflect this?
2. What is meant by 'a new order of righteousness and love'? Is there a reason why righteousness comes first?
3. If the Uniting Church is called 'a pilgrim people' what is the journey about?

**Paragraph 4:**

Readings:

Jude 1-3, 20-24; Acts 2:22-39; Romans 4:16-17; Romans 8; 1 John 1:1-4.

Questions:

1. What is the news of Christ's completed work? How do you think 'the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history'?
2. What is the significance of 'the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist'?
3. Does the Uniting Church logo indicate that our church is called into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings?

**Paragraph 5:**

Readings:

Psalms 119:105; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Acts 17:10-12.

Questions:

1. How does the 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony' nourish and regulate our faith and obedience?
2. Why is it a serious duty to read and preach from the Scriptures?

3. Does the Uniting Church logo affirm the biblical witness to Christ?

**Paragraph 6:**

Readings:

Matthew 26: 26-29, 28: 16-20; Acts 10: 34-48; Romans 5: 6-11, 6:1-11; Titus 3:3-8.

Questions:

1. What does the Uniting Church logo indicate about the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit?
2. How do we receive Christ's benefits? What kind of journey is it?
3. How do Word and Sacraments feed the church (see also paragraph 3)?

**Paragraph 7**

Readings:

Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:29-34; Acts 2:38-42, 3: 17-26, 8: 26-39, 16:25-34; 1 Peter 3:17-22.

Questions:

1. How does baptism signify our unity in Christ?
2. How do you participate in Christ's death, burial and resurrection?
3. Does the unfinished circle of the Uniting Church logo indicate something of the 'one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy'?

**Paragraph 8**

Readings:

Luke 22: 14-20; John 6: 25-65; Hebrews 13:12-16, 20-21; 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, 11:23-26; 1 John 5: 6-12.

Questions:

1. Why is the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion 'constantly repeated in the life of the Church'?
2. How does the Holy Spirit help us to receive this sacrament? Does the Uniting Church logo reflect anything of this?
3. What do you experience in participating in the Lord's Supper? How does your experience compare with the description in this paragraph?

### **Paragraph 9**

Readings:

John 1: 1-18; Luke 1: 26-55, 24: 44-49; 1 Corinthians: 2; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Questions:

1. Read the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. Do they assist you to enter into unity with the Church throughout the ages?
2. What kind of wisdom is needed for 'the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age'?
3. Does the Uniting Church logo bear witness to our allegiance to the Holy Trinity?

### **Paragraph 10**

Readings:

John 14; 2 Corinthians 3: 7-18; Ephesians 2: 1-10; 2 Peter 3:1-2, 13-18; Acts 7:7.

Questions:

1. Read an extract from one of the reformation statements. Does it remind you of 'the grace which ... justifies through faith', 'the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier' and 'the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture'?
2. What do you think is meant by the 'obedience and freedom of faith'?
3. How would you explain this paragraph in terms of the Uniting Church logo?

### **Paragraph 11**

Readings:

Romans 11:13-12:8; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 1; Matthew 10:16, 24:45.

Questions:

1. What is meant by 'an informed faith'? How can literary, historical and scientific enquiry be of assistance? What kind of scholarship is 'faithful'?
2. How do we of the Uniting Church interact with 'a worldwide fellowship of Churches' in contact with 'contemporary thought' and in understanding our 'nature and mission'?

3. What fresh words and deeds are we being called to? In what ways will such words and deeds confess our Lord? Will they accord with the Uniting Church logo?

### **Paragraph 12**

Readings:

2 Corinthians 1:20-22; Ephesians 4:4-6, 17-32; James 2: 14-26, 1 Peter 2:1-10.

Questions:

1. What is the connection between baptism and membership?
2. Have the promises of God been confirmed for you?
3. Does the Uniting Church logo remind us of the faith and service into which we have been baptized?

### **Paragraph 13**

Readings:

1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 1:1-14, 4:4-16; Acts 18:24-28; James 5:13-20.

Questions:

1. What is the purpose of 'a diversity of gifts'? (See also paragraph 3).
2. The paragraph states: '[the Uniting Church] will order her life in response to God's call to enter more fully into her mission'. Do you think the Uniting Church is doing this?
3. Does the Uniting Church logo indicate something about the mission of the Uniting Church?

### **Paragraph 14**

Readings:

John 21: 15-17; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy 2:1-7, 4:1-5; Titus: 1:1-9, Hebrews 13:7.

Questions:

1. What is the 'significance of ordination in the life of the Church' and how does the congregation participate in it?
2. How do you think 'the renewed participation of all the people of God' will maintain the 'apostolic witness to Christ in the Church'?

3. Does the Uniting Church logo remind us of 'the substance of the faith'?

### **Paragraph 15**

Readings:

Matthew 16:13-19; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 14:39-40, 16:19-20, Ephesians 5: 21.

Questions:

1. The government of the Uniting Church is entrusted to representatives but who alone is supreme in the Church?
2. In what ways are the councils of the Uniting Church 'inter-related'? Why do you think 'it is obligatory for [the Assembly] to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church'?

See J. Davis McCaughey *Commentary on the Basis of Union*, Melbourne: The Uniting Church Press, The Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, 1980), 93. McCaughey writes that 'Assemblies like all other councils can err; and on important matters it is therefore necessary that the Assembly should be prevented from acting without correction or concurrence from the wider body of the faithful'.

3. Is there an aspect of the Uniting Church logo that might remind us that councils can get things wrong? How can we be 'united in mutual submission in the service of the Gospel'?

### **Paragraph 16**

Readings:

1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Philippians 2: 1-11, James 1:16-27; 1 John 3:1-3.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to take on 'the form of a servant'?
2. Have you experienced God dealing with you personally?
3. Do you find the 'fatherly care of God' reflected in the Uniting Church logo?

### **Paragraph 17**

Readings:

1 Peter 2:13-17; Galatians 5:13-14; Hebrews 10:1; Matthew 18:15-20.

Questions:

1. The book of Hebrews describes the Old Testament law and its sacrifices as a 'shadow of the good things to come [RSV]'. How would you describe the Uniting Church law in relation to 'the good things to come'?
2. Does the Uniting Church logo give an indication of 'the good things to come'?
3. What kind of authority does the church have?

### **Paragraph 18**

Readings:

John 17; Ephesians 1: 15-23; Hebrews 12:1-24, 13:20-21, Revelation 1:1-6; 22:16-21.

Questions:

1. Paragraph 3 states that the Church is 'a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal'. Can you find a similar statement in this last paragraph? Is this journey reflected in the Uniting Church logo?
2. Is there a connection between belonging to the people of God on the way to the promised end and seeking a deeper unity with other Churches?
3. Do you find the prayer that God will constantly correct what is erroneous in the life of the Uniting Church encouraging?

### **General Response to this Study:**

Questions:

1. Do you think the Basis of Union is an adequately utilised resource in the life of the Uniting Church?
2. Where does the Uniting Church logo fit in?
3. How would you explain the Uniting Church's distinctive features to a new member of the Church?