

Christian Unity Working Group

Introduction

The Christian Unity Working Group (CUWG) is located within the General Secretariat. The CUWG is responsible for oversight of the ecumenical relationships of the Uniting Church. From its inception, the Uniting Church has maintained a consistent and open-ended commitment to the visible unity of all Christians, in terms clearly stated in the Basis of Union. Massive progress has been made on theological convergence and mutual understanding between Christian churches, but the scandal of division remains, especially at the Eucharistic table. Globally and locally, the task is incomplete. Indeed, there are new points of tension if not division within the one Body of Christ, so that the challenges of ecumenical work and bilateral dialogue remain acute.

Since September 2004, the Rev. Rodney Horsfield has been Chair of the CUWG, with Ms. Maureen Postma as Deputy Chair. The CUWG maintains an office in Melbourne and is staffed by a Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Sandy Yule (half-time). The CUWG has met in most months since the last Assembly. It holds a national conference annually. It relates to synod Ecumenical Relations Committees (where these exist) and currently has oversight of UCA representation on national and international ecumenical bodies and five national bi-lateral dialogue teams. Since 2005, the CUWG has been represented on the Doctrine Working Group by the Rev. Rodney Horsfield and is in regular communication with other Assembly bodies such as the Worship Working Group, the Relations with Other Faiths Working Group, Uniting International Mission (now UnitingWorld) and UnitingJustice

The members of the CUWG appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee after at the Eleventh Assembly were: Rev. Margaret Blair (Assembly member, former Presbytery Minister), Rev. Rachel Kronberger (Co-chair, Salvation Army Dialogue, Christian Conference of Asia programme committee past member), Rev. Gay Loftus (Assembly member, Deacon), Rev. Charity Majiza (Former General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches), Ms. Joan McRae (Chair, Victorian Synod Ecumenical Affairs Committee, Member VCC Executive), Ms. Maureen Postma (past General Secretary, Victorian Council of Churches), Rev. Eric Smith (Represented UCA at the Debrecen WARC General Council), Ms. Isabel Thomas Dobson (Member of Assembly Standing Committee, Presbytery Minister), Rev. Apwee Ting (Chang Mai CCA Assembly participant) and Rev. Andrew Tiver (Seoul WMC participant). The Rev. Eric Smith and the Rev. Apwee Ting have resigned from the CUWG due to pressure of other commitments. The CUWG also includes co-opted members: Rev. Hamish Christie-Johnston (until 2008), Rev. Dr. Rob Gallacher, Rev. Professor Robert Gribben, Rev. Professor Chris Mostert, Ms. Judi Fisher and Rev.

Dr. D'Arcy Wood (all for the whole period) and as potential replacements for members who have resigned, the Rev. Lynden Broadstock, the Rev. Dr. Avril Hannah-Jones and the Rev. Dr. Ji Zhang.

The CUWG is pleased to nominate as CUWG Chair for the period 2009-12 Ms. Maureen Postma, who is a member of this Twelfth Assembly and has served as Deputy Chair of the CUWG (2004-09) and as General Secretary of the Victorian Council of Churches (2001-09).

The CUWG is charged by the Assembly to encourage and resource the UCA to pray, study and work

- a) towards the goal of the Christian Unity of the churches,
- b) towards uniting Christians in faith, worship, witness and ministry.

The objectives of the CUWG fall into three areas:

- Promoting and managing dialogues with other churches in Australia
- Overseeing Uniting Church participation in ecumenical bodies
- Assisting reception of the fruits of ecumenical work within the UCA and monitoring the ecumenical implications of Assembly decisions and UCA practices

Dialogues

The CUWG notes the shift in focus of ecumenical work from the explicit goal of 'organic unity' towards more proximate goals such as 'visible unity', 'spiritual unity', 'koinonia', 'shared mission' and 'deeper fellowship'. We believe that these proximate goals are important because they challenge us to do what we can do now for enhancing Christian unity. We would nevertheless want to stress that the goal of organic unity - at least as it impacts upon the possibility of shared eucharistic fellowship - remains a most important challenge for all churches. Our dialogues are developed on the basis of specific, stated goals which are drawn from a list which includes a wide range of possible goals, ranging from that of mutual friendship to that of seeking organic union.

The UCA is currently in active dialogue with five other churches in Australia. These churches are the Anglican Church of Australia, the Baptist Union of Australia, the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Roman Catholic Church and The Salvation Army. These dialogues are meeting regularly with clearly formulated aims. We have received from the LCA / UCA Dialogue a revised draft of the Declaration of Mutual Recognition (adopted by the UCA at the 2000 Assembly but not yet presented to the LCA National Convention) and the report 'Summary and Outcome of Discussion on the Interpretation of Scripture'. We have also received a report 'The Mission of the Church' from the RC / UCA Dialogue. The ACA / UCA Dialogue is working towards formulating practical proposals for enhanced mutual co-operation in the wake of 'For the Sake of the Gospel'. The TSA / UCA Dialogue is exploring the themes of 'Holiness and Social Justice'. The BUA /

UCA Dialogue is exploring 'Church Membership'. There are also conversations about possible dialogues with other churches, though without definite proposals at this time.

Dialogue with the Greek Orthodox Church continues to be suspended from their side, though we are pleased to report that a one-day conversation has been held to explore possibilities of restarting this dialogue. Efforts to achieve similar conversations with the Oriental Orthodox and the Churches of Christ have not been successful in this triennium.

A formal Conversation has been established with the Chinese Methodist Church in Australia. This is not seen as a theological dialogue, but as a conversation about mission co-operation within the frame provided by our common membership of the World Methodist Council.

Ecumenical Bodies

The UCA continues to play an active part in all ecumenical bodies of which we are a member church. We are represented quite fully in the governance of these bodies as detailed below. This has been achieved through our long term commitment to full participation in these bodies and through the dedicated efforts of those who have represented the UCA at Assemblies and other ecumenical meetings. While most of this representation is by our UCA members as individuals, their participation is supported by the UCA through the Ecumenical Travel Fund and they report regularly to the CUWG.

World Council of Churches (WCC)

The CUWG:

- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Gregor Henderson on the WCC Central Committee
- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Elenie Poulos on the WCC Churches Commission on International Affairs
- Notes that the UCA is represented by Ms. Aimee Kent on the WCC Education and Ecumenical Formation Commission
- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Dr. Richard Treloar (through co-operative arrangement with the Anglican Church of Australia) on the Faith and Order Standing Commission and thanks him for his full reports from their meetings
- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Dr. Sandy Yule in the meetings of WCC Ecumenical Officers
- Notes with appreciation the participation of Mr. Matthew Oliver and Mr David Gale in the WCC Ecumenical Water Network meeting in June 2008
- Notes with appreciation the participation of the Rev. Prof. James Haire in the WCC Solidarity team visit to Indonesia (as 'Living Letters') in July 2008, as part of the work of the Decade to Overcome Violence
- Notes with appreciation the participation of the Rev. Gregor Henderson and the Rev.

Prof. James Haire in the joint WCC / CCA meeting in Bangladesh in September 2008

- Notes that the UCA was represented by the Rev. Terence Corbin and the Rev. Charity Majiza in the United and Uniting Churches Consultation held in October - November 2008 in South Africa and notes with appreciation the appointment of the Rev. Charity Majiza to the Continuation Committee which will be planning the next Consultation
- Notes with appreciation the participation of the Rev. Dr. Sandy Yule in the team led by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia visiting the Philippines in November 2007 and in the Forum on 'The Future of the Ecumenical Movement' held in Korea in November 2008
- Prepared the UCA response to the WCC Faith and Order document 'Called to Be One Church', which response has been favourably received by the WCC (2007)
- Prepared the UCA response to the WCC Faith and Order document 'The Nature and Mission of the Church' (2009)
- Distributes electronically the regular media releases from the WCC Communications Unit within the UCA

Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

The CUWG:

- Notes the movement of the CCA Headquarters from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Professor James Haire on the CCA Executive Committee
- Notes that the UCA is represented by Ms. Kathryn Tretheway on the CCA Faith, Mission and Unity Committee
- Notes with appreciation the visit to Australia by the CCA General Secretary, Mr. Prawate Kidh-Arn, in November 2006
- Welcomes the appointment of Mr. Carlos Ocampo, UCA member, as Joint Executive Secretary for Justice, International Affairs, Development & Service of the CCA
- Notes with appreciation the participation of the Rev. Terence Corbin in the Round Table meeting held in Bangkok in March, 2009, to consider increasing CCA self-reliance
- Notes with appreciation the plans for the first meeting of CCA / WCC Asian member church Ecumenical Officers in June / July 2009

World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)

The CUWG:

- Notes that the UCA is represented by Ms. Judi Fisher as Moderator of the Communications Network of the WARC and as such, she is one of the officers of WARC, as well as through her more recent

role as WARC Pacific Executive member and Vice President

- Expresses thanks to Bruce Best for his membership on the WARC Communications Network until his resignation in 2007
- Welcomes the proposed formation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) from the WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council at the Uniting General Council meeting in 2010
- Notes with appreciation the invitation to the Rev. Terence Corkin and the UCA to work with the WARC-REC Planning Committee around the use of consensus decision-making in this first General Council of the WCRC
- Notes with appreciation the visit to Australia by the WARC General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, in December 2006
- Notes with appreciation the first joint session of WARC officers and Lutheran World Federation executive members at Chavannes-de-Bogis in November 2006 to focus on Lutheran-Reformed relations worldwide
- Welcomes and supports the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 2009

World Methodist Council (WMC)

The CUWG:

- Notes that the UCA is represented by the Rev. Professor Emeritus Robert Gribben as Chair of the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogues of the WMC and that he, Ms. Ann Connan and the Rev. Ken Anderson have represented the UCA at recent WMC Executive Committee meetings
- Notes that the UCA was represented by the Rev. Professor Emeritus Robert Gribben (Vic.), Rev. Ken Anderson (SA), Rev. John Bottomley (Vic.), Ms. Ann Connan (Vic.), Ms. Dorothy Demack (Qld.), Rev. Steve Francis (WA), Ms. Jean Gunn (Vic.), Ms. Alyson Madsen (Qld.), Rev. Sang Taek Lee (NSW), Rev. Andrew Tiver (Vic.) and Rev. Myong Duk Yang (NSW) at the Seoul meeting of the World Methodist Council in July 2006, and in the WMC Conference, 'God in Christ Reconciling'.
- Welcomes with joy the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the WMC, together with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation at this meeting in Seoul.
- Gives thanks for the opportunity to host the WMC Executive Committee in Sydney in September 2007
- Gives thanks for the Conversation now established with the Chinese Methodist Church in Australia to explore mission co-operation on the basis of our common membership in the WMC

- Gives thanks for the celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Charles Wesley in 2008

National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)

The CUWG:

- Welcomes and supports the appointment of the Rev. Tara Curlewis as the NCCA General Secretary (from April 2009)
- Expresses thanks for the work of the Rev. John Henderson as General Secretary and extends good wishes to him for his new work as Principal of Australian Lutheran College
- Notes with appreciation the service of the Rev. Professor James Haire as NCCA President (2004-2007)
- Notes with appreciation the election of the Rev. Tara Curlewis and Ms. Aimee Kent to the NCCA Executive at the NCCA Forum in 2007
- Supports and promotes the continuing reception of the document 'Australian Churches Covenanting Together' which all NCCA member churches have signed
- Notes the continuing importance of the existing agreements for the mutual recognition of each other's baptism by a number of churches, as a basis for further recognition, and urges all congregations to use the Baptism Certificate that names the churches and identifies the formula agreed with those churches with which we share mutual recognition of baptism
- Gives thanks to God for the opportunities for ecumenical sharing provided by the World Day of Prayer and the Week of Prayer for Unity and Reconciliation
- Notes with appreciation the Centenary celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Unity and Reconciliation this year
- Notes with appreciation the 'Safe as Churches' project (dealing with the overcoming of sexual and other forms of abuse within the life of the churches) sponsored by the NCCA
- Notes with appreciation the emergence of 'Growing Churches in the Australian Context' project of the NCCA which carries forward our shared concern for the churches' participation in the mission of God (following the demise of the NCCA Commission on Mission in 2006)
- Affirms the continuing work of the National Aboriginal and Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) and welcomes the theological conferences which NATSIEC run
- Affirms the ongoing work of the NCCA Christian World Service and notes in particular the recent development of 'Act for Peace'

Ecumenical Concerns

We note two specific ecumenical concerns at this time. The first concern is the seriousness of our lack of success in achieving full mutual recognition of ordained ministry with our partner churches. The second concern is the need for the development of fresh ecumenical leadership among our own people.

Ministry

The mutual recognition of ordained ministry remains one of the most intractable areas of discussion with other churches. The Trilateral dialogue (Anglican / Lutheran / UCA) has now formulated its responses to the four questions addressed to it and posed questions of its own to each of the participating churches concerning the exercise of episkope, personal and corporate. The CUWG is continuing to work on a proposed UCA response to the questions posed to us. This is an area in which our ministry practices are as important as our official teaching concerning ministry.

Ecumenical Formation

The CUWG continues to seek ways of involving younger people in ecumenical formation. We have welcomed a number of younger members in the last few years and we have an annual budget of \$3,000 to assist younger people to participate in ecumenical conferences and other opportunities for ecumenical formation. The CUWG ran a workshop on Ecumenism at the recent National Christian Youth Convention in Melbourne. We are also looking to offer support to UCA people who might volunteer to participate in the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine / Israel. We call the attention of the Assembly to the importance of ongoing ecumenical formation for our emerging leaders.

The Perennial Challenge of Christian Unity

Christian unity is ultimately a gift of God, not the result of our human efforts. The CUWG continues to seek ways of assisting the UCA to receive this gift effectively. Our commitment to Christian unity is a central part of our commitment to Christ. We belong together because Christ has called us and given us each other as companions. Our continuing challenge is to find ways to make our unity in Christ visible and effective.

Rev Dr Sandy Yule
Secretary

CHRISTIAN UNITY WORKING GROUP MANDATE

- Responsible to:** The Assembly
- Reporting arrangements:** The Assembly and the Standing Committee
- Mission statement:** In seeking to enter more deeply into the life and witness of the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, the UCA is committed to journeying towards the promised goal of the unity of all God's people (*The Basis Of Union* paragraphs 2,3, and 18). To this end, and 'so the world may believe' (John 17), the Christian Unity Working Group is charged to encourage and resource the UCA to pray, study and work
- a) towards the goal of the Christian Unity of the churches,
 - b) towards uniting Christians in faith, worship, witness and ministry.
- Mandate:**
1. Support Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations in expanding and deepening their understanding of the *koinonia* to which Christ calls his people, both in places where cooperative work is developing and in places where renewed ecumenical vision is required.
 2. Encourage and support Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations as they nurture local initiatives towards Christian unity and mutual relationships with equivalent councils of partner churches.
 3. Build and strengthen inter-church relationships both bi-laterally and multi-laterally, in Australia and internationally by:
 - developing the potential for further Church unions;
 - reaching ecumenical agreements with other churches;
 - initiating and maintaining bi-lateral dialogues and facilitating the implementing of their reports.
 4. Develop relationships with other churches, ecumenical bodies and our two related Christian World Communions, and disseminate throughout the Church the concerns, progress and achievements of the world wide ecumenical movement. (The ecumenical bodies include the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches, and the 2 related Christian World Communions are the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council).
 5. Engage the church in relating the 4ecumenical vision to new patterns of church life by promoting biblical study and theological exploration, and by disseminating throughout the church the fruits of the world-wide ecumenical movement, with special adherence to the Lund Principle – 'that the churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately'.
- General:** The responsibilities include:
- focusing the activities of the agency on the vision of the Assembly as a whole;
 - advising the Assembly and/or the Standing Committee on policy matters within their area of responsibility;
 - making policy decisions where the Assembly or the Standing Committee has delegated authority for certain

- policy areas, either through the agency mandate or by resolution;
- assisting the Christian Unity Secretary in the implementation of policies determined by the Assembly and/or the Standing Committee;
 - providing advice to the President and General Secretary on ecumenical issues and relationships;
 - participating in cross-agency projects and teams established by the Assembly.

Membership:

Chairperson (appointed by Assembly);
Christian Unity Secretary;
Ten persons appointed by Standing Committee

Approved by Assembly Standing Committee March 2006