

# Theology and Discipleship

In the report to the 11th Assembly Rob Bos identified the Christian church's disestablishment, increasing violence in the world, and the multi-faith environment as three characteristics of the current Australian context which require urgent attention. In this report let me suggest that those characteristics remain as crucial. As a church we are called to respond to them by being a church that unashamedly confesses its faith, seeks to serve God's missional purposes, and fosters discipleship among our people. Theology and Discipleship seeks to assist the Uniting Church in these areas.

## Confession

Confession has a two-fold meaning: either admitting to wrongdoing or affirming faith. Here I am focusing on the second meaning. We need to know and express our faith confidently yet respectfully in the secular, postmodern, multi-faith and pluralistic context of contemporary Australia in which the church has a less recognized place than formerly. This can mean being freer to be the church God wants us to be. That requires us to understand our faith, namely our doctrine, and be able to express it in different contexts appropriately. The Working Group on Doctrine has been endeavouring to assist our church to deal with various theological issues. The two background papers are provided to the Assembly to enable people to think theologically. One paper, "The nature of Doctrine and the role of the Assembly", points out that theology has different kinds of statements with different status. The second paper, "Guidance for the Church's Faithful Thinking", describes the way to go about theological thinking.

The Working Group on Doctrine is convinced that in our current context we need to be giving more time to explicit theological thinking. We require thoughtful theological responses to the challenges we face to guide our practice. Hence we have encouraged the Assembly Standing Committee to make use of theological listeners and have times for theological input. We suggest that this could be taken up by synods and presbyteries also, namely occasionally have orders of the day for theological reflection and use theological listeners. To be an apostolic church is to be true to the original apostles yet to do so in language that is contemporary, using confessional language.

This also relates to our worship. As the Latin expression puts it: *lex orandi, lex credendi* (literally law of praying, law of believing). Our prayer and worship indicate our belief. Worship in the early church preceded careful theology. Theology can correct inadequate worship and belief. It is important that our worship does appropriately express our beliefs. The Working Group on Worship works to provide resources and guidance to enable the Uniting Church to worship with integrity. Resources such as *Uniting in Worship 2* are, of course, intended to be used flexibly and

thereby have life breathed into them if they are to do what they are meant to do, namely assist the Uniting Church to worship God in different contexts. In our worship we confess in both senses of the word.

## Mission

The church does not exist for itself but was called into existence to serve God's missional purposes. To use another Latin expression, the *missio Dei* is what the church is to participate in. The church is to be involved in God's mission, serving the reign of God, which has come in Jesus Christ but has yet to come in its fullness. To be an apostolic church means to be both based on the apostolic witness and a "sent" church living by and engaged in God's mission in the world. Mission is not just an aspect of the life of the church, mission is central. Each church is to discern with the aid of the Spirit how it can appropriately participate in what God is doing and wants to do in the world. It does so by seeking to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God. It serves God's mission by what it endeavours to be as a community of faith as well as by what it does and supports locally, regionally and internationally.

The Working Group on Mission and Evangelism has been wrestling with issues of a healthier practice of mission and evangelism. A combined colloquium involving members of the Working Group on Doctrine and Mission and Evangelism people will be held in November this year focusing on developing a theology for mission and evangelism appropriate for the Uniting Church. Work has already been taking place in relation to this project.

## Discipleship

Belonging to the church is not just a matter of membership but of discipleship. Congregations need to give more attention to enabling people to become, grow and serve as disciples of Jesus Christ. The primary elements of discipleship are deepening, equipping and ministering. Deepening is about relationships with God, self and others. Equipping is about preparation involving gifts and call, skills and knowledge. Ministering is about serving and participating.

Theology and Discipleship has developed the "Becoming Disciples" process introduced at the last Assembly. The issue of membership has been raised through the paper "A church of passionate disciples." Further work is being done on this. At present Theology and Discipleship is seeking to foster the recognition of different aspects of peacemaking as important to discipleship, especially in a world that continues to emphasize violence as a way to raise and resolve issues.

Resources from Theology and Discipleship can be found on the Assembly web site: [www.assembly.uca.org.au](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au) and proceeding from there.

## WORKING GROUP ON WORSHIP

### The Ordering of the Church

Services of ordination, induction and commissioning were not revised for *Uniting in Worship 2*, because such revisions may have been affected by decisions that the Assembly may have made following its dealing with the report of the Specified Ministries Task Group.

These services were revised in 2008, and adopted for use from 1 January 2009 (ASC Minutes 08.86.02). There are some changes from the previous services, which were produced after the 1994 Assembly. Chief among these are:

#### *Service of Ordination:*

- As baptism conveys the foundational call to all Christian ministry, the Gathering of the People of God includes a recollection of baptism;
- The number of Questions to the ordinand has been reduced from twelve to four;
- The previous Vows not included in the four Questions have been incorporated into the Charge, which is to be delivered as given in the service;
- A short induction service is included where the ordinand is being ordained in the placement in which s/he will minister.

#### *Service of Induction:*

- The Gathering also includes a recollection of baptism;
- The presentation of the signs of ministry by the people is slightly briefer.

These services may be found at <http://assembly.uca.org.au/worship/resources/13-orderingservices.html/>

### A Short Guide for Daily Prayer

The Working Group, in conjunction with staff of the Queensland Synod, has produced a draft guide to daily prayer, which may be downloaded from <http://assembly.uca.org.au/worship/resources/9-prayers/24-dailyprayer.html>. Each day except Saturday echoes a season of the Church's year; Saturday reflects themes of rest and discipleship.

This draft resource is offered to groups and individuals, in daily prayer and in settings such as retreats. We encourage local adaptation, and would appreciate feedback on its use.

### Further work

The Working Group plans to produce a PowerPoint resource to help people who exercise ministries in leading worship, and also aims to produce a small booklet with a couple of full Services of the Lord's Day. It is also supporting the production of Exploring Worship, which will enhance younger people's appreciation of the Service of the Lord's Day.

## Membership

Some new members have joined the Working Group in this triennium: David Kim; Sue Pickering; Kerry Pierce; David Pitman; and Jenny Tymms. We farewelled Carol Bennett who has taken up the position of Synod Liaison Minister in Tasmania.

Rob Bos stepped down on resigning as National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship. We wish to record our appreciation of his unfailing support and good humour. We look forward to a similarly productive working relationship with Chris Walker.

**Rev Dr Paul Walton**  
**Convenor**

## WORKING GROUP ON DOCTRINE

### Doctrine in the Church

Doctrine is the teaching which *guides* the church to be the church. This teaching gains its authority from Jesus Christ who taught with authority and power, and by the power of the Holy Spirit continues here and now to call the church (Mark 1: 27). As the Basis of Union says "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."(Para 3)

As *church* teaching, doctrine relies on the witness of Scripture. It recalls that Jesus of Nazareth, who announced the coming reign of God, now calls the church into the new thing God is doing. Therefore, doctrine is hope-filled teaching which remains open to God's future. Awaiting the final and perfect praise which the church will offer to Jesus Christ, and knowing that at present the church only approximates it, this teaching remains open to correction. It is *eschatological*. (See 'The Faith of the Church' (1959), p.26, *Theology for Pilgrims*, Uniting Church Press, 2008; *The Basis of Union*, paragraph 18)

*The Basis of Union* echoes these themes throughout, and is thus an essential guide for the Uniting Church understands of doctrine as authoritative church teaching.

Doctrine may also be described as a *guardian* of the church's faith. That is, it will sound an alarm when the church takes steps which would dismantle the church's faith, where church ceases to be *the* church. This understanding of doctrine is helpful in every age, and also in our own time. In a globalised world and a time of post modernity, with a mix of secularisation and religious fundamentalisms, the church faces the challenge of learning from its own wisdom in order to engage in its missionary calling in a new age and culture. The church finds tensions within its own life as it seeks to respond to this context. On the one hand there is the lure of an apparent certainty in authoritarian literalism and fundamentalism; on the other hand the church is tempted to accept the lure of a 'new faith' by accommodating itself to the present culture and giving up the fundamentals of the church's story.

In this setting doctrine is the necessary task that the church undertakes in every age - of receiving the authoritative witness of the apostolic teaching and speaking the church's faith in the language of our own day.

Again, in our new context, the *Basis of Union* is a helpful reminder that the church's life and worship is shaped by the authoritative witness of Scripture. Additionally, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, 'framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days, to declare and guard the right understanding of the faith' are commended 'to ministers and congregations their use for instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity'. (*Basis of Union, paragraph 9*). The various Reformation confessions, declarations and other witnesses, are also forms of teaching where the church learns the essentials of Christian faith found there. (*paragraph 10*)

Many people have wrongly learned that 'doctrine' is something opposed to a simple faith, or is out of date. It has come to mean 'dull', 'disciplinarian' or 'dogmatic'. For Uniting Church people this is an unhelpful caricature. Anyone who takes seriously what the *Basis of Union* offers may not hold to such gross distortions. Rather, they will be presented with a challenge to engage in serious learning of the faith, ready to be 'discipled' by the teaching that comes from the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

Finally – although this statement belongs properly at the beginning - doctrine (teaching or theology) arises from the church's *worship of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. (See the notes to the Service of the Lord's Day, *Uniting in Worship 2*) The name of God pronounced at baptism points to the essential content of the church's teaching: the church set in God's world to be witness of God's past acts and living in hope of God's future. Such worship is inseparable from God's longing for justice and peace. The doctrine which arises from such worship is, therefore, not limited to 'mere talk', but expects that the church will be formed as a community of the gospel, shaped by a passion for God's reign, and engaged in those things which promote hope and life.

In Uniting Church polity the Assembly is the Council which has responsibility for the formulation of doctrine. The Working Group on Doctrine is providing a variety of resources to assist in this task. We regard this question as crucial: how are we to live faithfully as the church where there are strong differences of theological view, even among our own members? While, in its present form, the question has arisen within the discussion of leadership and sexuality, it takes us to character of the church and asks how we who were once enemies of God - and of one another - will learn to live together, as people reconciled by Jesus Christ.

### **Work Carried Out**

In the last Triennium this has been concentrated on presenting issues such as Sexuality and Leadership; Ordination; Baptism & Church membership including the 'Becoming Disciples'

process; The Basis of Union; The Ministry of Oversight ('Episcopate'); Guidelines for the conduct of funerals in conjunction with the Working Group on Worship and giving consideration to how to strengthen the doctrinal process in the Assembly.

The Working Group on Doctrine has developed the role of 'Theological Listener' for the Assembly Standing Committee where a member of the Working Group attends the ASC meetings and provides feedback on the explicit and implicit theological issues in their deliberations. This is but one of the ways in which the Working Group continues to resource the Assembly Standing Committee.

A paper prepared by Rob Bos in 2008, 'That We May Not Lose the Way' continues to challenge the group in its future planning and setting of priorities.

On the issue of Sexuality and Leadership the Working Group has continued to wrestle with the doctrinal issues that continue to be unresolved in the church. We have engaged in reading and discussion within the Working Group; we have arranged two consultations with various groups in the church to try and clarify the doctrinal issues present in the different points of view. We have addressed the question of what it means to live with doctrinal difference in a church committed to the apostolic faith of the church. Two papers were developed out of those consultations: Towards a Theology of the Person, and Biblical Hermeneutics. A full report of the process of the consultations was written for the Assembly Standing Committee. These papers, the report and a paper tracking the 30 year history of the issue are offered to the church through the Working Group's website. [www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine)

The Working Group has been conscious of the need to offer its work to the wider church and to challenge congregations and Presbyteries to consider how they understand and live "the faith once delivered to the saints." The publication of short studies called 'Doc.bytes' both in glossy print and on the website is a developing resource. Topics covered so far include "Doctrine", "Apologetics" and "Marriage" with "Evangelism", "Baptism", "Ordination", and "Peacemaking" available before the coming Assembly. We encourage members of the church to visit the Doctrine website which we will continue to update and use as a primary means of making the work of the group available to the church.

### **The Next Triennium**

The Working Group has begun planning for the next triennium following the 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly. We are considering the following issues as being in the forefront of our priorities.

A draft paper on "Theological Diversity" will be developed into a formal statement that addresses how we might live together respectfully in a diverse church. Theology and practice need to be seen to go together. Allied to this issue is the question of what it means to be an "Apostolic and Confessing Church". Work has started on this.

Other related areas arose from our listening to various groups in the church, which it will be desirable to develop are “Theological Hermeneutics” and “Testing the Spirit’s Guidance.” These, too, are issues that indirectly relate to the Sexuality and Leadership issue but have broader implications. The Working group recognizes the significant challenges to faith in these times and is looking at models that help people think theologically and live out their discipleship. One example of this is the paper recently published on our website - “Bible Reading: 12 Simple Guidelines”. We plan more of such resources.

Current world events have challenged us with the question of “Being a Peacemaking Church.” We believe it is time to give this topic more attention.

In November 2009 the Working Group on Doctrine will hold a joint colloquium with the Mission and Evangelism Network on “A Theology of Mission and Evangelism for the UCA.” We expect that this Colloquium will develop material enabling the Uniting Church to have a clearer understanding of what mission means for our church and to reclaim evangelism as an integral part of the church’s ministry.

### **Membership of the Working Group**

This important area of the Church’s life is largely resourced by people with other full-time jobs. We welcome the energetic contribution of the Revd Dr Chris Walker as National Consultant from November 2008 and enjoy the support of the Assembly Secretariat for administrative assistance. Wes Campbell is Convenor and Rod Horsfield is Secretary of the Working Group. The demands of writing and research are greater than the current members can manage. However we have learned from the colloquia we organized in 2008 when papers produced for those occasions were written by people beyond the Doctrine Working Group but done in conjunction with it. They have proved to be excellent resources. We are currently exploring how we can “outsource” some of our work and deliberately seek to identify people with expertise and passion in particular areas. Lecturers in theological colleges and people who have completed or are doing advanced study come to mind.

The Revd Dr Rob Bos, formerly National Consultant for Theology & Discipleship (2002-2007) has provided leadership of a very high calibre. The Working Group on Doctrine is deeply indebted to Rob for his theological work, his attention to the process of developing doctrine in this church, and communication of our work. His personal friendship and solidarity, commitment to the work of the church and his work in seeking to develop a church of passionate disciples, have assisted this working group immeasurably.

Finally, along with our acknowledgement of Rob Bos, we also express our thanks to former members who have resigned or retired, Elizabeth Walker (who was chairperson of Theology and Discipleship from 2000–2007 and secretary to the

Working Group), Paul Walton, Sef Carroll, Andrew Collis, Peter Hobson and Lauren Fee.

### **Revd Dr Wes Campbell Convenor**

#### **Working Group on Mission & Evangelism**

After the last Assembly, the Missiology & Evangelism Working Groups decided to combine and operate under the shared facilitation of two Conveners. It was felt this was a positive step that would ensure the focus was not lost from either group. Accordingly we submit a shared report as we affirm that:

“The Church is by nature missionary to the extent that, if it ceases to be missionary, it has not just failed in one of its tasks, it has ceased being Church”

*What is Mission?: Theological Explorations* by J. Andrew Kirk, 2000, p. 30.

In seeking to find ways of reminding the national church that mission and evangelism lie at the heart of who we are as a Church, we have continued to meet twice each year. Our aim has been to meet in a different state, thus experiencing first hand some of the developments (both positive and problematical) in each Synod.

Our meeting format focused on personal sharing and intentional relationship building as well as hearing the good news stories from each Synod. The group has been committed in modeling a relational style of meeting that affirms and encourages individuals as well as congregations and Synods. We have also visited and learned from various congregations who are active in Mission and Evangelism. We have visited Adelaide, Ringwood North Congregation in Melbourne, Exodus Foundation and Cabramatta in Sydney, St Peter and Emmaus and the Carramar Congregations in Perth. These visits have proven wonderfully informative and encouraging both for the congregations and the working group members.

Mission and Evangelism has endeavoured to address the third stated key direction of the Eleventh Assembly (06.08):

#### 3. in consultation with other Councils of the Church:

- (i) to support and nurture the renewal of the passion for evangelism, discipleship formation and leadership development with an emphasis on spiritual development and faith sharing; and
- (ii) to request Theology and Discipleship and the Evangelism Working Group to develop key strategies including grass roots and inter-synod activity.

The Assembly Standing Committee decision (ASC 08.10.03) brought changes in structure to the work of mission and evangelism. It is now a national network and not a working group. The Theology and Discipleship National Consultant is still linked to

this network and offers to it the important task of theological reflection and other resourcing for the benefit of the wider church.

### **Colloquium with the Working Group on Doctrine**

As part of our wanting to focus on being a Missional church, rather than an institutional one, Mission and Evangelism invited the Working Group on Doctrine to conduct a two day joint colloquium. Among other items to be discussed will be how the Assembly might assist the Uniting Church to move from a theology of mission to a missional theology.

Other matters we hope to address in this colloquium include:

- Creating a common understanding of what we understand the mission of God actually is.
- Making clear a framework validating evangelistic praxis.
- Exploring the hospitality of God in mission and evangelism.
- Establishing a confessional rather than a dogmatic approach that is relevant to postmodern & post Christendom context.

This event will take place in Sydney in November 2009 and we look forward to working together.

### **Resources created**

Mission and Evangelism has focused on creating a website for the Mission & Evangelism Network as it has become. This will be attached to the website of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. On this site are our events, resources and other relevant information.

A discussion paper exploring a more contemporary understanding of what we mean when we speak of Mission and Evangelism, entitled *A Passion for Evangelism* has provided fuel for thought to our group and is available from the Uniting Church Mission and Evangelism Network attached to the website of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

We have been most successful in helping our Synods to think intentionally and to share with one another, not only resources, but ideas and events in an ongoing fashion.

Conversation Starters, continuing the practice of C-Change sheets, have been produced aimed at helping congregations explore issues involving mission and evangelism. These are single pages and aim at stimulating conversation among Church Council members, Elders, UCAF groups, Bible Studies and others. It is our intention to produce more of these in the future and we hope they will be of particular use to all congregations, especially those who no longer have access to ordained clergy. These are available from our website attached to the website of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Good news stories continue to be sought out and shared. These are not always spectacular but are stories of faithful congregations engaging in mission

and evangelism with integrity and courage. These stories are also on our website.

Mission and Evangelism has produced a paper entitled *Enhancers and Inhibitors of Evangelism*. Again this paper is designed to stimulate conversation and encourage congregation to risk new ways. This paper is available from our website and also the Assembly website under Theology & Discipleship.

### **Proposed Convocation**

Mission and Evangelism has noted from our excursions and reflections that many congregations and Ministers struggle with how to disciple people in this busy world. As a result, we encouraged the Synod of NSW in its Writing Workshop, and suggested affordable, practical and accessible resources be identified, shared and / or created. A few topics we suggested were:

- 'How do we help people grow from first contact into disciples'
- 'How can we assist congregations rediscover a passion for and commitment to identifying and participating in God's mission for the world.'

Mission and Evangelism has also noticed a growing weariness among Ministers across the church. As a result of this many wonderful resources lie unused because some leaders are too dispirited to engage them. We note there often seems to be so much information to process that it feels like a tsunami is crashing in on church leaders and Ministers. While we have discussed this issue with the President – Elect, Alistair Macrae, we also wish to draw to Assembly and Theology and Discipleship's attention that this has real implications for all our work – there is little point developing resources if there's little hope of them being used. However, we do note that this is not the case for everyone, and that mission and evangelism is thriving in many places.

Part of our hope for the future of Assembly's work is to create community – e.g., to create 'spiritual disciplines' that re-energise individuals, both lay and ordained, as well as to establish networks of support. Mission and Evangelism felt the President's Conferences held in 2008 began this much needed work and would rejoice in its continuance.

As part of addressing this need, Mission and Evangelism calls for a convocation to focus on Ministerial health and wellbeing, to address issues such as inspiration, issues of positive self image, motivation, growth and development, spirituality. Ministry health and leadership; identify sense of inertia; drag of institutionalism. Topics that could be discussed and explored would be:

- What is the 20% thing that will make a significant difference in a Minister's missional life?
- What are the 'liberating systems' that can be created that will enable freedom for personal and ministry space?

- How can Congregations and Church Councils be encouraged to help give permission to Ministers to develop sustainable systems?

### **From Working Group to Network**

Mission and Evangelism has had to reconsider its role and now functions as a network rather than a working group, calling on our home Synods to fund at least an annual meeting. It will be our intention to link these meetings to an event, such as a conference, to save double travelling and we also hope the membership can be more fluid as topics and needs change. Rev Graham Beattie from the Queensland Synod will be convening this network and we wish him every blessing for the future.

Finally thank you to our team; you are an amazing bunch of people; thanks to Rob Bos for his past support; and to Chris Walker for his enthusiasm and theological clarity. We look forward to our continued work together.

**Rev Ian Robinson WA**  
**Rev Bron Murphy NSW**  
**Co-Convenors**

### **Conclusion**

Thank you to Rob Bos for his dedication, leadership and graciousness as National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship for the six years to January 2008. We also thank Rob for the outline of our context as we move to the next triennium. Thank you to Glenda Blakefield for acting in the National Consultant role during the interim period.

In the past three years there have been a number of changes in personnel and the way in which the Working Groups relate. New members are present in all the Working Groups. The Working Group on Relations with Other Faiths now sits within the mandate of Uniting Faith and Discipleship and relates directly to the Associate General Secretary. The Mission and Evangelism Working Group has become a National Network. Thank you to all members of the Working Groups, especially the Chairpersons and Secretaries, for their dedication, thoughtfulness and prayerfulness in all the tasks they undertake on behalf of the Assembly and the Uniting Church.

Our thanks to Elizabeth Walker, Chairperson of Theology and Discipleship for seven years, to Ruth Crispin for her secretarial assistance and now to Julie Redal for her ongoing secretarial support.

We look towards the next triennium as outlined in the Reports.

**Rev Dr Chris Walker**  
**National Consultant**

**Rev Carolyn Thornley**  
**Chairperson**