



**UNDERSTANDING
THE
UNITING CHURCH
IN AUSTRALIA**

David R. Merritt

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Contents

THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA	3
BELIEFS of The Uniting Church	6
MEMBERSHIP in The Uniting Church	10
WORSHIP in The Uniting Church	12
ORGANISATION of The Uniting Church	14
MISSION and The Uniting Church	17
OTHER CHURCHES and The Uniting Church	20
THE FUTURE and The Uniting Church	21
Glossary of key words	22
The emblem	24

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THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

The Uniting Church in Australia was formed in 1977 as a union of three churches which had been present in Australia for nearly two centuries. The Congregational Union of Australia, The Methodist Church of Australasia and The Presbyterian Church of Australia agreed to come together on a Basis of Union accepted by the three churches after some twenty-three years of negotiation.

Some Congregational and Presbyterian congregations decided not to enter this union, but all Methodist churches, working under a national constitution, became part of the Uniting Church.

The inauguration, dated 22nd June 1977, was an expression of a unity of belief, mission and purpose which had been growing among the three churches over many years.

The denominations that united

The three churches that united to form the Uniting Church in Australia were each part of major traditions which are still important and represented in other parts of the world.

Congregationalism began at the end of the sixteenth century in England. It was a reform movement that separated from the Church of England. It has a particularly strong emphasis on the congregation - the local gathered group of Christians.

Methodism also began in England as a movement within the Church of England during the eighteenth century. John Wesley through preaching and the formation of weekly groups ('class meetings') encouraged a personal experience of faith that affected practical living. At the end of the eighteenth century Methodism became a denomination with particular emphases on evangelism, social action, and lay leadership, especially local lay preachers.

Presbyterianism came from the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, Scotland and the Netherlands in the sixteenth century. John Knox in Scotland and John Calvin in Geneva emphasised beliefs in the sovereignty or rule of God and that our relation to God depends on God's grace. Presbyterianism organised the church with courts (groups of people) given responsibility at local, regional and state or national levels.

It was these three streams of tradition that came together to form the Uniting Church in Australia in June 1977.

In the 1991 census 1 387 646 people identified themselves with the Uniting Church in Australia.

A new church?

To the question, 'Is The Uniting Church in Australia a new church?' we can answer both yes and no. It is new in that it is a recent demonstration of unity among parts of the Christian church; unity which we believe is Christ's will, and for which he prayed. It is also a sign of newness which reminds us of God's promise 'Look, I am making all things new'. (See John 17:21 and Revelation 21:5.) It is new in that it marks the acceptance of new responsibilities in one organisation by people whose commitment was previously to separate, although co-operating units within the universal church. It is new in that there is a new organisation with its own name, a Basis of Union, a constitution and an emblem with recognition by acts of parliament in the various states. It is new because it expresses a new partnership with Aboriginal people through the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. It is new because it involves its members in commitments to take fresh account of the part of the world in which we live.

Yet it is not as new as may at first appear. The Uniting Church represents the decision by three churches which had been witnessing for centuries under other forms of government to unite in obedience to what is seen as Christ's will for today. Thus it is the continuation, in Australia, of the three great traditions in the world-wide church described above.

Through them it traces its history, so that it celebrates as its birthday, not 22nd June 1977, but the Day of Pentecost (around 33 A.D.) in common with all other Christians. It sees its roots going back even further than that in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, with his call to discipleship. Earlier still, it sees itself in the succession of people who recognise God as Lord, and who entered into covenant with God, whose story is told in the Old Testament.

When it makes decisions about the life and mission of the church, The Uniting Church does not try to invent a new or distinctive Uniting Church theology. On the contrary it deliberately tries to make decisions as part of the world-wide twenty centuries old church. This commitment is clearly expressed in *The Basis of Union*:

The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church. The Uniting Church recognises that it is related to other churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in

faith and mission... It 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 the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches. (The Basis of Union, paragraph 2)

New ways of being the church

The last sentence above makes it clear that The Uniting Church does commit itself to the possibility of God calling the church to new ways of being the church in Australia. The Basis of Union ends on that note of commitment and hope:

The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. (The Basis of Union, paragraph 18)

There is a still deeper answer to the question of newness. Whether The Uniting Church in Australia is indeed a sign of the new life and renewal God gives will depend on the Church being faithful in the new circumstances of our day and whether it is ready to give itself sacrificially to serve God and people. On this depends whether future generations will see The Uniting Church as evidence of renewal or simply as an elaborate exercise in restructuring.

People of faith who care

Another way to understand the Uniting Church in Australia is to think of hundreds of thousands of people, adults, young people and children

- in all parts of Australia
- coming together in churches to worship God, renew their faith, and enlarge their understanding of what it means to be Christian
- caring for people in need
- working in the church and community to express in every part of life the vision of a more caring and just world that comes to us from Jesus Christ.

BELIEFS

of The Uniting Church

The Uniting Church stands firmly with the church throughout the ages and with the churches of the Reformation in its essential beliefs and teachings. The centre of our faith is to confess Jesus as Lord and to know that our relation to God depends on the grace of God.

The Uniting Church affirms the beliefs taught in the church from earliest days. '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.' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 3)

The Uniting Church worships one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It sees the church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, living as a pilgrim people and moving towards the promised goal.

The Uniting Church accepts the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique testimony 'in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 5). In the interpretation of scripture the Uniting Church accepts the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The confessions and preaching of the Reformation and the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival also have an important place in our church's tradition.

The key to the Uniting Church's understanding of the faith and mission of the church is set out in *The Basis of Union*. *The Basis of Union* is the platform on which the earlier three denominations united in 1977 to form the Uniting Church in Australia. It states the central affirmations of the Christian faith and as such is a guide to what is central in the life of the Uniting Church.

The Basis of Union is not like a detailed map of beliefs setting out everything we need to believe or to do as Christians. It is more like a series of signposts giving us a clear sense of direction. As we go forward in that direction we are expected to be faithful to what comes from the past and also open to the new things God will call us to in our day.

The Bible

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 it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom 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 its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures... (The Basis of Union, paragraph 5)

The Bible has a special place as the source of nourishment to Christians, as the main source of the church's preaching, and as authority and guidance for living.

The sacraments

Sacraments are symbolic actions which express deep truths about our relation to God. The two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper commanded by Jesus in the Bible are observed in the Uniting Church as ways by which the Good News is made known. In the sacraments Christians reaffirm their relationship to God and to each other through Jesus Christ.

The Uniting Church baptises children and adults by pouring water on the head of the person being baptised or by immersing adults in water.

Every baptism we see reminds us of our own baptism and assures us that what is true for the person being baptised is also true for us. God welcomes us into the family of God and we share in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Uniting Church believes a person may be baptised only once, whether as child or adult. Confirmation is the ceremony in the church in which young people or adults confirm their mature sense of call to be followers of Christ and are strengthened by God as disciples.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion is based on Jesus' last meal with his disciples and uses bread and wine to remember Christ's death and resurrection, to renew communion with him, and to thank God for the gift of his presence with us.

The Lordship of Christ

In raising Jesus to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore 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 people are called to respond in faith. (The Basis of Union paragraph 3)

What God has done in Jesus Christ is the source of salvation and the ground of our hope. It gives confidence to us that our lives have meaning and that Christ's way of love and sacrifice is stronger than evil and hatred. We can live in this hope, committing our future to God.

Justification by grace through faith

God accepts us not because we do something to deserve it but because God is gracious. This acceptance is what the word 'justification' means. On our part we accept God's gift and live in relation to Jesus Christ.

This is one of the central teachings of the Bible and one of the great beliefs reaffirmed at the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The announcement of the grace of God is the central good news of the gospel and stands strongly against any who say that God accepts only those who prove themselves good enough by what they do. Obedience and service and changed lives are important but they follow God's acceptance of us. We love God and show it in our love to others because Christ first loved us and gave himself for us.

All share in ministry

All who confess Jesus Christ and seek to be his followers are committed to continuing his work of service in the world. This is what the word ministry means - service. In this sense all members of the church are ministers.

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. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's 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 Basis of Union, paragraph 13)

The church from the beginning has recognised men and women called to special leadership in ways important for the life of the church. With the Spirit's guidance, the church calls some to engage in special training and to give themselves more fully to the preaching of the gospel, leading in worship, caring for people, and serving those in need. In the Uniting Church such people may be ordained and accredited as Ministers of the Word or Deacons, or set apart for the ministry of youth worker, or lay preacher.

The Uniting Church elects as elders men and women who will share with Ministers of the Word in building up the congregation, visiting and caring for people.

Freedom in Christ

One of the great gifts from God is freedom. In the stories of the ancient people of God in the Old Testament and through the New Testament's good news about Jesus again and again freedom and liberation are shown as God's gift.

Some religious systems impose endless laws and demands for conformity on their followers. By comparison the Christian gospel calls us to live as free men and women, children of God, trusting the generosity (grace) of God, accepting ourselves and each other, living as free people rather than slaves.

This does not mean that there are no laws or that it is all right to do whatever we please. This could, in fact, be another form of slavery - a slavery to destructive aspects of human nature and greed. Rather, in our desire to love and serve God, we see the law as guide and Jesus' example as the pattern for responsible living.

Clarifying doctrine

It is necessary for any Church to clarify its understanding of the faith under new circumstances that arise. In The United Church every Christian is expected to live as a follower of Christ in light of the good news of the gospel. But when the Church as a whole needs to clarify what it stands for The United Church assigns this responsibility to the Assembly. *The Basis of Union* states:

The Assembly... has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline... (The Basis of Union, paragraph 15e)

To guide it in some aspects of this task of clarifying doctrine the Assembly appoints a Commission on Doctrine which deals with questions referred to it by the Assembly. Its deliberations become a useful guide to members of The United Church about the faith and its implications for our day.

MEMBERSHIP

in The Uniting Church

All who were members of any of the three Churches that came together in union are members of The Uniting Church. Now 'membership is open to all who are baptised into the Holy Catholic Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 12) The Church baptises those who confess the Christian faith, and children for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the church takes responsibility. It recognises these categories of membership:

Member: a baptised person recognised by the Council of Elders as being within the pastoral responsibility of the Church.

Confirmed member: a member who is recognised as having affirmed faith in Jesus Christ, accepted the responsibilities of membership and acknowledged the discipline of the Church.

Member-in-association: a person who for the time being participates in the life of a congregation of the Church while maintaining membership in another denomination.

Adherent: a person who shares in the life of a congregation and is within the pastoral responsibility of the Church and who is not a Member or Member-in-association.

In the Church, membership is not seen as a status or privilege, but rather as a commission to take responsible action in the life and mission of the Church.

In the statement on baptism published by the World Council of Churches, we read: 'To be baptised is to live in and for Jesus Christ, in and for the church, in and for the world'.

The Basis of Union describes what it means to be in the Church:

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 Basis of Union*, paragraph 3)

WORSHIP

in The Uniting Church

One way in which people respond to the God who gives them life is worship. 'Worship' in a literal sense means recognising God's 'worth'. When we worship we come together to be reminded of God's faithfulness and goodness, to hear God's word and to respond in praise, gratitude, confession of sins, acceptance of forgiveness, prayer for ourselves and for the world and to rededicate ourselves in God's service.

Worship has a central place in the Christian life. In worship believers renew their awareness of God, affirm the fellowship they have with each other and are equipped to live their daily lives as Christians.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion is central in worship. It is a sign and seal of Christ's continuing presence with his people.

In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptised 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 in Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which Christ will bring to consummation. (The Basis of Union paragraph 8)

Many forms of worship are appropriate - from the gathering of a large congregation expressing some of the grandeur, majesty and beauty appropriate to such worship to informal sharing experiences of small groups of people. The Uniting Church recognises the appropriateness of a variety of liturgical forms.

After 10 years of development and experimental use, the Uniting Church approved and recommended for use in congregations a series of worship services published under the title *Uniting in Worship*. The People's Book provides worshippers with an outline of worship and a rich treasury of prayers and Bible readings for use in worship.

ORGANISATION

of The Uniting Church

The Uniting Church in Australia is governed by groups of men and women, lay and ordained, consulting together in each area of the church's life. This is called a system of 'interrelated councils'. It is not a hierarchy of persons such as bishops nor a hierarchy of church courts.

One council is not 'above' the other. Each council is assigned particular responsibilities and powers and is expected to make decisions and take action in its areas of responsibility consulting other councils as appropriate.

The congregation

The congregation is a local gathering of people for worship, community and mission. It consists of both members and adherents who participate in its life but have not become members.

The congregation holds a meeting not less than twice each year to look at its life and work, to elect persons to councils or other positions, to transact its business, and to plan and share concerns. It elects elders who together with Ministers form a Council of Elders to care for people and to supervise the mission of the congregation.

A group of congregations may be recognised as a parish. This makes possible sharing between congregations in many ways, the exercising of team ministries, and encourages sharing finances. A Parish Meeting is held at least once every year and a Parish Council has responsibility for general management of the parish's affairs. A parish can also be one large congregation.

There are approximately 3 000 congregations in The Uniting Church in Australia.

The Council of Elders

The Council of Elders consists of the Ministers of the Word, Deacons and Lay Pastors of a parish together with Elders elected by the congregation. The Council of Elders is 'responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 15b)

The Leader's Book provides those leading worship with additional assistance while freeing worshippers from unnecessary dependence on written resources.

Uniting in Worship is both a guide and a stimulus to the Uniting Church to find the kind of worship which is rooted in the Biblical tradition of faith and which helps people in today's world to respond to God with all of their lives.

The National Commission on Liturgy prepares a three year lectionary or system of Bible readings to ensure that the major parts of the Bible are regularly read in worship. It is based on the International Revised Common Lectionary used by many other churches in Australia and overseas.

The Uniting Church understands worship as both a privilege and a necessity. The people of the church are a pilgrim people always on the way towards a promised goal. On the way Christ feeds us with word and sacraments and gives us the gift of the Spirit in order that we may not lose the way. (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 3)

The Presbytery

The Presbytery is the Council which has oversight of congregations within a region. In city areas this may be fairly compact and in less settled areas it could stretch a thousand kilometres. It is the council which ordains Ministers of the Word and Deacons and to which they are responsible: It has the duty of caring for them and for ensuring that their work is carried out faithfully in the congregations within its bounds.

The task of the Presbytery is 'to perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area for which it is responsible... It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its bounds, encouraging members to strengthen one another's faith, to bear one another's burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus. It will promote those wider aspects of the work of the Church committed to it by the Synod or Assembly.' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 15c)

A presbytery's membership consists of elected lay persons from every parish and all Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, and Lay Pastors in its parishes.

In 1994 there were 53 presbyteries in The Uniting Church in Australia.

The Synod

The Synod is the council of The Uniting Church in Australia which operates at state level. Its membership too consists of lay people, Ministers of the Word, and Deacons elected by congregations and presbyteries. It has oversight of the church's worship, witness and service within its bounds. It is able to provide for some things not possible in the other councils already named including training of ministers, oversight of schools and colleges, aspects of ministry on a wider basis than congregations or presbyteries could undertake and property and financial administration.

There are 7 synods in The Uniting Church in Australia.

Each synod elects a Moderator to hold office for between 1 and 3 years.

The Assembly

The Assembly is the national Australia-wide council of The Uniting Church in Australia. Its membership consists of both ministerial and lay representatives, mainly from synods and presbyteries. It meets every 3 years.

The Assembly '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. It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils.' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 15e)

The Assembly elects a President for a 3 year term of office.

MISSION

and The Uniting Church

Mission is not a word restricted to the church. Trade missions, diplomatic missions, missions in time of war all have the same basic meaning of being sent to do a particular job.

Christians recognise that they are sent by Jesus Christ, as his early apostles were, to be his servants to a world in need. Many opportunities will present themselves to congregations to work in the spirit of Christ among people in churches and in the community in which they live.

In addition, there will be needs which go beyond one congregation or parish. At times an agency outside the congregations will be better able to offer services on behalf of the whole church, or it may be in a position to give help to some congregations in their planning or programs.

The patterns and structures of The Uniting Church vary from state to state and we can expect its priorities to change from time to time. The essential thing is that the church should constantly be seeking to witness to the grace (generosity) of God and to continue the mission of the church in the world.

'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 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 attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of the crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.' (The Basis of Union, paragraph 4)

The mission of the church is expressed in everything the church does in congregations, presbyteries, synods and Assembly. However some agencies and particular activities of the church give expression to important aspects of the church's mission.

World mission

The Uniting Church has an extensive network of services in collaboration with churches in other countries. Mission staff work in partnership with indigenous churches in a range of evangelistic, education, health and agricultural programs that strengthen the work of the church and meet the needs of people in other countries.

Frontier Services

Frontier Services is a national agency of The Uniting Church in Australia offering services to people in remote areas particularly in the Northern Territory, the north of Western Australia and the north of Queensland. Patrol padres using four wheel drive vehicles and planes minister to isolated homesteads and mining communities; health, family and community services reach across the inland; hostels and aged care services meet the needs of people in remote settlements.

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

From the beginning The Uniting Church in Australia has actively sought to establish mutually affirming relationships with Aboriginal people. In 1985 the formation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) was a significant event. It places control of Aboriginal congregations and services in the hands of Aboriginal people. The UAICC is a national body related to the Assembly.

Multiculturalism

The Uniting Church has adopted a deliberate policy of encouraging recognition of the variety of cultures and races that make up contemporary Australia. It includes in its life congregations of many ethnic backgrounds. In 1985 the National Assembly adopted a statement that The Uniting Church is a multicultural church, noting that its membership comprises many races, cultures and languages, and committing the church to recognise this more fully in its life and mission.

Social justice

The Uniting Church is known in the Australian community for its active role in matters that affect the lives of people. Seeking social justice is seen as a necessary part of the church's mission in society. Among the issues about which the church has been active are peace, nuclear disarmament, land rights for Aboriginal people, the equality of women and men in church and society, aspects of sexuality, gambling, and unemployment.

Ministry with children and young people

The Uniting Church through congregations, synods and the Assembly is committed to recognising the abilities of children and young people, including them in its life, and providing social, educational, worship and evangelistic experiences appropriate to them.

Community service

With over 1 000 centres providing community services The Uniting Church in Australia is the largest provider of non-government welfare services in Australia. These services include aged care, children's and family services, youth services, disability services, counselling, accommodation and drug and alcohol services.

In all aspects of its mission the church tries to give expression to the meaning for all people of the Good News that comes to us through Jesus Christ.

OTHER CHURCHES

and The Uniting Church

The Uniting Church believes that the will of Christ is for the church to be one. The use of the word 'Uniting' rather than 'United' in its name declares its openness to further union or united activity within the whole Christian church. The Uniting Church in Australia is not the end of a process but one step in a continuing process of uniting.

The Uniting Church is committed 'to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches.' (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 2)

Negotiations about official relationships with other churches are the responsibility of the Assembly. The Assembly appoints a National Commission on Christian Unity to act in its name and to assist the Church to pursue at all levels of its life the practical implications of the commitment to union.

Links with other churches in Australia and abroad are maintained through a network of ecumenical bodies including the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The Uniting Church in Australia is actively involved in the Christian Conference of Asia and with churches in the Pacific Conference of Churches.

The Church recognises its need of Christians in other traditions who have much to offer if the fullness of the gospel is to be experienced and proclaimed. One example of this is that the Australian church welcomes ministers and lay leaders from churches in the Pacific and Asia to enrich its life with special skills and transcultural experience. Mission work has moved from a one-way relationship of an established church giving to a younger church to two churches sharing together, each with gifts to give and receive.

The most important expressions of our commitment to open and affirming relationships with other churches are shown in the practical cooperation between churches in each local region.

THE FUTURE

and The Uniting Church

Two references to *The Basis of Union* will help to summarise the spirit and faith which guide The Uniting Church in Australia.

Gifts from the past - readiness to go forward

The Basis of Union begins with gratitude to God for the gifts that come to us from the past - gifts which invite us to new faithfulness in our day:

We give praise for God's gifts of grace to each of us in years past. We acknowledge that none of us has responded to God's love with a full obedience. We look for a continuing renewal in which God will use our worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people.

To this end, we declare our readiness to go forward in sole loyalty to Christ, the living head of the Church; we remain open to constant reform under his Word, and seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*We acknowledge one another in love and joy as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ; we hear anew his commission to make disciples of all nations and will daily seek to obey his will and serve the world for which he died. We await with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever. (Based on *The Basis of Union* paragraph 1)*

The people of God on the way

The *Basis of Union* ends with a stirring statement of confidence about journeying hopefully into the unknown future:

*The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. (*The Basis of Union*, paragraph 18)*

Glossary of key words

Adherent A person who participates in the life of a congregation but is not a member of The Uniting Church in Australia.

Assembly is the national council of the church.

Baptism The sacrament of admission to the church where the use of water is a sign of God's acceptance and forgiveness.

Basis of Union The statement outlining the beliefs and commitments of the Church and its patterns of organisation and ministry on which the three Churches agreed to unite in 1977.

Confirmation The act by which a baptised person is confirmed in their faith and commits themselves to accept the responsibilities of church membership.

Congregation is the local gathering of members and adherents.

Council A group of ordained and lay people by which the Church is governed. At national level, the Assembly; at state or equivalent level, the Synod; at regional level, the Presbytery; at local level, the Parish Council and/or the Council of Elders.

Deacon A person chosen, trained and ordained for a ministry of service usually directed toward those who are suffering or disadvantaged in the community.

Elder A man or woman chosen by the congregation and commissioned to join with the Minister of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, and Lay Pastor, in guiding the congregation in its mission, caring for people, and helping in its life and worship.

Faith (i) A person's response of trust in God, (ii) the beliefs which the Church holds.

Grace God's free, undeserved favour given to people, supremely in Jesus Christ, to bring us to new life.

Holy Communion The sacrament in which Christian believers express their unity in Christ and with each other, as they follow the pattern of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples before his crucifixion and take bread and wine as a sign of taking Christ into their lives. May also be called The Lord's Supper or the Eucharist.

Lord's Supper Another name for the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Member A person recognised as a member of The Uniting Church having been baptised. There are three categories of member: baptised member, confirmed member, and member-in-association (a person who also maintains membership in another denomination).

Minister of the Word A person chosen, trained and ordained for a ministry of proclaiming the gospel through word, sacraments, pastoral care, and equipping all members for their ministry.

Ministry Service: the work all Christians are called to do, following the pattern of service set by Jesus Christ. In this sense, all Christians can be called ministers.

Mission Being sent: the fact that Jesus Christ sends his followers into the world to serve it and point men and women to the way to full life through him.

Moderator A person elected and appointed by a synod to chair its meetings and be its senior officer usually for periods of 1 to 3 years.

Parish One or more congregations recognised by a presbytery as a pastoral and administrative unit.

Presbytery The regional council of the church.

President A person elected and appointed by the Assembly to preside at its meetings and to be its senior officer for a period of 3 years.

Synod The state council of the church.

The Emblem



The emblem of the Uniting Church in Australia shows the cross of Jesus Christ, in its light and love, standing over a darkened world - redeeming it through grace and truth. By that cross people are bound to Christ and 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 points to the fact that we are uniting; as a semicircle it also reminds us that the renewing of both church and world are as yet incomplete.

The emblem symbolises something of the vision we have glimpsed and the hopes we hold for the future. In particular it reminds us:

- that the gospel message is central in all that we seek to do;
- of the need for constant reform and renewal;
- of our commitment to worship, witness and service.

