

INTRODUCTION

From July 12 to 19 2003 the members of the 10th Assembly met at the University of Melbourne. The theme of the Tenth Assembly of the Uniting Church - "*Witness the Glory of God*" - was the expectation and the experience of all who were in attendance.

On behalf of the Wurundjuri people Vince Ross issued the welcome to country and James Haire prayed before members entered the Dining Hall at Ormond College for the formal business of the first session.

The opening service of the Assembly was held at the Princess Theatre in the centre of the city. The grand theatrical setting was wonderfully utilised by the team that produced the opening worship with readings from Elijah's struggle to persevere in his call providing the framework for the worship.

At the opening service Dean Drayton was installed as the tenth President of the Uniting Church in Australia. Around 1500 people took part and experienced a wonderful start to the Assembly. The members and official guests then experienced the warm hospitality of the Synod at the supper afterwards.

The hospitality and organisation provided by the new synod of Victoria and Tasmania was exemplary. Throughout the course of the Assembly Melbourne delivered fine (and cool) weather. Unlike previous Assemblies the members of the Assembly did not attend local congregations on the Sunday, but instead met and covenanted together as a community as they met around word and sacrament. However there were many other opportunities to connect with different parts of the Uniting Church community in Melbourne including visiting a Tongan congregation for the ecumenical dinner on Wednesday evening, a reception at Parliament House and the involvement with many visitors and volunteers throughout the course of the week.

Assembly membership comprised 280 people, drawn from every corner of the country, and from every part of the life of the Uniting Church. They were joined by 100 people in the Visitors Program, 15 KUCA-A people plus leaders ("Kids of the Uniting Church in Australia - Assembly"), more than 30 official guests from overseas and other Australian churches, plus scores of national and local resource people, staff, volunteers, and daily visitors. Members of the Assembly were accommodated in four university colleges, and the business venue was Wilson Hall. Lunch was available from the many food outlets that service the students of the University, while other meals were provided in the Colleges.

As evidenced by these minutes, the Assembly transacted a lot of business. While the sexuality discussion and decisions attracted the most media attention during the Assembly, and in the church afterwards, there were many other important matters of business transacted. Significant attention was given to working at future directions for the Assembly. It is a major challenge for a group of nearly three hundred people to cast a vision for the future. However through use of small groups, plenary sessions and hard work by the Facilitation Group some important key directions were named for the work of the Assembly for the next triennium.

Task Groups established by the 9th Assembly on Theological Education, Elders and Church Council, and on the ministry of Deacon reported and actions taken by the 10th Assembly are recorded in these minutes. A report on the "Becoming Disciples" process excited the Assembly and a number of steps were put in train to further develop the way our church calls people to faith, incorporates them into the local Christian community and disciples them into the future. A significant number of proposals were submitted that related to the church's understanding of ministry and what might be helpful for the mission of the church in the future. These proposals were passed on the Standing Committee and the issues will return to the 11th Assembly.

A very special feature of this Assembly was the combined presentation by the Assembly Agencies. The presentation named where the Agencies felt that God was calling them in their work over the next three years. Through a variety of media the Agencies presented a

powerful invitation to think about hearing truth and sharing pain; forming and nurturing gospel community; living and working in solidarity and being bearers and witnesses of hope.

Preparations for the 10th Assembly took seriously the need for the Assembly to be gathered and nurtured as a community of faith. Daily Eucharist was available, an hour a day was allocated to worship and Bible study, the Assembly began with prayer, was blessed by an inspiring opening service, a moving covenanting together on Sunday morning and prayer throughout and to the end. Rev Dorothy Lee, professor of New Testament at the United Faculty in Melbourne, delivered an insightful and inspiring series of studies on the glory of God based on John's Gospel. Members were convinced that the Spirit of God was moving with them during the week.

This publication contains only the Minutes of the Tenth Assembly, plus the essential appendices. Copies of all Assembly reports and other working papers are available from the Assembly web site (nat.uca.org.au) and office.

The Eleventh Assembly will be held in Brisbane in 2006.

The Assembly records its thanks to all in Melbourne who assisted in so many ways, particularly to the convener of the Local Arrangements Committee Philip Creed, Barbara Spencer the leader of the small group process, Chris Johnson the Assembly administrative rock and John Rose and the many others in the Melbourne office of the Victoria and Tasmania Synod who contributed greatly to the smooth running of the Assembly. Special thanks also to D'Arcy Wood and the other members of the Facilitation Group who assisted the Assembly to find its voice.

By the time of the closing worship in Wilson Hall on 19 July we were a community of people who knew we had struggled together in faithfulness to fulfil a common call as the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Minutes of the Tenth Assembly record the formal decisions of this Council of the Uniting Church. It is left to those of us who were there to speak in our own words of what a significant event it was, and how through the joy and the struggles we had witnessed the glory of God.

Terence Corkin
General Secretary

December 2003