

# Chapter 3

## ***'Living in God's Image and Grace'***

'If anyone is in Christ, there it a new creation.'  
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

We are made in God's image.  
We live as sexual beings.  
We learn about our sexuality.  
We develop our sexual practice.

So far we have identified the church as a community seeking to shape its life in response and witness to the reconciling grace of God in Jesus Christ and in anticipation of the Reign of God. We have discussed the sources of our faith and the way in which the Scripture informs our Christian living. We now consider the ways in which faith informs our sexual identity and our decision-making about sexual practice. This chapter includes:

- a brief reflection on the nature of Christian sexual ethics;
- introductions to questions of sexual ethics;
- a reflection on the nature of gender and human sexuality;
- a brief account of sexual ethics in the Judeo-Christian tradition;
- a proposed 'ethic of character' for Christian living.

### **Ethics**

3.1. Ethics is the systematic study of moral principles, values and obligations that guide human behaviour. From a Christian perspective, ethics seeks to guide human behaviour and discusses how human beings ought to behave in the context of our covenant relationship with God. Indeed, Christian ethics is more than the systematic study of the moral principles, rather it is an attempt to understand and justify moral obligation in relation to the will of the God. For the Christian community, therefore, ethics relies on an appeal to the revelation of God's own moral character and will. Christian ethics can 'only make sense from the point of view of what we believe has happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.'<sup>24</sup>

3.2. A church community seeking to follow the way of Jesus Christ cannot escape questions of sexuality. It is part of our human make-up. Sexual expression involves making decisions. Developing an ethic of sexuality is an important means of helping people make informed decisions about their sexual behaviour. It is the way of 'uniting faith and sexuality'.

### ***Human Sexuality***

3.3. Human sexuality includes far more than our experience and desire for sharing genital pleasure. It has to do with who we are, it is an integral part of our being. We are born with biological maleness and femaleness, with male or female genetic make up and genital organs. The social and cultural context provide us with gender roles and we internalise understandings of what it means to be male or female.

<sup>24</sup>. Stanley Hauerwas  
William H. Willimon,  
*Resident Aliens*,  
Abingdon, 1992. P.7.

25. Conjoy, lee, & Nowotny, op. cit.

26. James B Nelson, *The Intimate Connection; Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality*, Westminster, Philadelphia. 1988.

27. Morton & Barbara Kelsey, *The Sacrament of Sexuality*, Element, Rockport, 1986.

28. Chris Glaser, *Coming Out to God: Prayers for Lesbians and gay Men*,

3.4. The Task Group held many discussions about gender roles and the social relationships between women and men. There is neither time nor space to deal with the issues adequately. It is important to note however that over the last 100 years patriarchal gender roles have been challenged. Many women are breaking free from historically and culturally-conditioned gender roles and seeking equality. There is an ongoing process of redefining what it means to be a woman.<sup>25</sup> More recently men are beginning to challenge some of the cultural definitions of what it means to be a man.<sup>26</sup>

3.5. Human sexuality may begin with our being individually created male and female, but our sexuality is also the desire to be connected to other human beings. We tend to be pair-bonding creatures. The creation story describes the man clinging to the woman with the words 'at last bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh' (*Genesis 2:23*). We experience our sexuality as that desire to move out of our separateness into intimate communication and communion with another person. This desire to come together we call 'erotic attraction'. Human experience indicates that this attraction, while usually is towards the opposite sex, can also be to the same sex or both. Our sexuality draws us into relationships with others which have physical, social and spiritual dimensions.

### **Sexuality and Spirituality**

3.6. As indicated by the title of this Report, there is a need to reunite the physical and spiritual dimensions of our lives. God created human beings as a unity of body, mind and spirit. Jesus, quoting the first commandment, urged his followers to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. (*Matthew 22:37*)

3.7. The incarnation of Christ, whom the church confesses to be both fully human and fully divine, demonstrates the unity of body, mind and spirit into which we are called to participate.

3.8. Sexuality is not simply about gender, or about the reproductive process or even about pleasure; it also has to do with our connection with God. The act of sexual love is more than the expression of a personal relationship between two people, it is a symbol of something beyond the personal. Some have even described sexuality as one of the 'sacraments of our spirituality'.<sup>27</sup> It is often in our unity with the other that we experience our unity with God. Just as 'letting go' in the sexual act often brings pleasure, so 'letting go' in our relationship with God brings a greater sense of God's shalom (peace, wholeness).

*I view these two powers, my sexuality and my spirituality, as dancers. Initially both were wall flowers afraid to dance. My spirituality was immobilised by proscriptions and fixed answers. My sexuality was hiding in a closet, ashamed of itself .... Each took turns attempting to lead, to control the dance, while the other felt crowded and claustrophobic and backed away. Finally they found times when the dance led them, and for brief moments they became perfect dancers, full of grace, true to each other. They danced together as my soul.<sup>28</sup>*

*Their Family and Friends*, Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, 1991, PP. 14f.

<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Lee, 'Freedom and the Body' in Confoy, Lee and of Nowotny, OP. Cit., PP. 48-50.

3.9. The connection between our sexual and spiritual dimensions often has been ignored. Part of that derives from the dualistic understanding of the person to which we have already referred. When we reclaim the wholeness of body and spirit, we also reclaim the connection between our spirituality and our sexuality.<sup>29</sup>

3.10. While spirituality and sexuality are not identical they are linked. For Paul the body and the spirit are 'not identical, but their strength comes in their connection, not their separation or rejection (*I Corinthians 6:19-20*). Stressing this connection, Paul calls for an affirmation of the body and therefore of our sexuality. Paul was at odds with those in the Christian community who sought to devalue the significance of the body in order to be more 'spiritual' (the gnostics).

By uniting body, mind and spirit, new life and energy may flow into our relationship with God. We may also be better enabled to experience the presence of God in our living, our loving and our relationships.

#### ***Sexual Ethics***

3.12. Throughout the history of the church, Christian communities have studied Scripture, debated, prayed, practised different patterns, struggled and grown, in a faithful desire to discern God's will for the ethical ordering of Christian life. The search for a Christian sexual ethic has been part of this struggle.

3.13. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has regarded the central purpose of sexual intercourse to be procreation, with the result that sexual activity has been evaluated within the framework of marriage. Procreation, sexuality and marriage were understood primarily in terms of the welfare not of individuals, but of society. In this context, 'the ideal sexual act has been defined as heterosexual, potentially procreative and expressive of the permanent, monogamous relationship which facilitated the nurture of children and domestic and social stability.'<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Sowie Cahill, 'Sexual Ethics' in James Childress F, John Macquarrie (eds), *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, SCM Press, p. 579.

3.14. The Enlightenment and Reformation period prompted a shift in Western thinking to value the experience of the individual on a par with that of the society. For sexual ethics, this shift has had significant consequences. 'Personal fulfillment and interpersonal relationship have become a pre-eminent criteria of sexual morality; marriage and procreation are evaluated in relation to these goals'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cahill, op. cit.

3.15. To summarise, Christian ethical thinking in relation to sex has experienced a shift. In earlier times sex was understood to lead to procreation and domestic partnership in an essentially economic relationship. Since the mid 20th century, an increasingly high importance has been placed on a couple's interpersonal relationship and experience of love. Given the shifting understanding in the purpose of sexuality there has been a shift in the corresponding sexual ethic.

3.16. Christian people in Australia live and function in a secular society which has largely abandoned traditional Christian sexual ethics. With the so-called sexual revolution and reliable means of

contraception, the 'thou-shalt-not' of the Christian tradition has been challenged by the 'thou shalt' of contemporary culture. For example, no longer is virginity seen as sacred, nor sexual involvement regarded as defiling. The sexuality of single, divorced and widowed people is no longer ignored and gay men and lesbian women no longer stay in the closet. Sex is talked about and the fear of sex has been replaced by the pressure to 'do it right', to enjoy it and let the world know how well you do it.

- 3.17. Responses to the Interim Report indicate that, confronted by changing patterns of behaviour, many Uniting Church people are concerned about the lack of ethical standards and call for a return to 'traditional morality'. Others celebrate what they perceive as a new openness, acceptance and honesty and call the Church to develop a new sexual ethic. Others are simply confused. This ongoing internal struggle creates an environment in which people feel hurt, confused and angry, which often hampers effective discussion about sexual ethics. Too often people feel trapped into taking sides, with the result that dialogue ceases.

***A Christian Sexual 'Ethics of Character'***

- 3.18. The Christian ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas, pleads for the church to avoid the pitfalls of moralism and legalism by working hard to develop what he refers to as an 'ethics of character' rather than an ethics of rules.<sup>32</sup>

***More than rules***

- 3.19. An ethics based simply on rules is bound to fail because of our natural resistance to commands. Rules emerge from the wider narrative in which they have meaning. The rules will have authority to the extent that they serve to witness to our calling – to who we are called to be in Christ (*Philippians 3:14*). The focus is not on the rules but on the kind of people we want to be. What sort of behaviours bear witness to God's intention for human life? What behaviours and patterns testify to the redeeming grace of Christ? Our behaviours consciously and unconsciously reflect our attitudes and underlying values and beliefs.

***Character produces behaviour***

- 3.20. An ethics of character emphasises that our particular behaviours arise out of the beliefs we hold as Christians. Christ calls us to find life in loving God, neighbour and self. By desiring, by God's grace and in the strength of the Spirit, to be a loving person we will seek to behave lovingly.
- 3.21. In order to develop guiding principles as a Christian community we firstly ask: 'Who, in Christ, am I called to be? What sort of community is the church called to be?'
- 3.22. Christian discipleship, not least in the area of sexuality, is the outworking in community of how we might live in the light of who we are in Jesus Christ. St Paul's ethics have been characterised as the exhortation to 'become what you are'. That is, live into the identity and character of the new creation that is ours through the grace and mercy of Christ.

32. Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1983 grace of Christ?

3.23. Those who participate in the community of faith are drawn into a web of belief or narrative. Rooted in Scripture, the narrative is the ever-evolving story of God's relationship with God's people. It is this narrative which shapes lives and forms 'a community of character'. 'Christians have not been called just to do right, to observe the law, though doing the right and observing the law are not irrelevant to being good. Rather, for Christians the moral life, at least spiritually, is seen as a journey through life sustained by fidelity to the cross of Christ which brings a fulfillment no law can ever embody.'<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup>. Stanley Hauerwas,  
*Against the Nations*,  
Winston Press, New York,  
1985, P. 41.

**Behaviours build character.**

3.24. This process is two-way. Character produces behaviour and behaviours build character. Certain behaviour will arise out of a certain kind of character and behaviours reinforce character. Living faithfully in relationships, for example, can help form us into more faithful human beings. In the light of this, any decision on whether or not to engage in sexual activity involves searching for an answer to the primary question: How can our actions in this situation best reflect the love, faithfulness and grace of God that comes in Jesus Christ?

3.25. So, an ethics of character leads us to ask different questions from those of a mere situational ethics. We seek virtues and behaviours not as 'best practice' on the human level but because they are modelled for us in Jesus whose Spirit empowers us to follow his way. In nurturing communities of character, decisions about personal sexual behaviour exist within the wider context of community.

- What impact will this sexual activity have on the wider community of faith?
- Is this sexual activity reflecting a faithful, committed relationship?
- Will this sexual activity enrich or enhance our relationships?
- Will the vulnerabilities likely to be opened up be respected by all parties?
- Is the decision to engage in sexual activity a truly mutual one? Does each partner respect the other's 'no'?
- Will this action create hurt or cause long-term distrust in the community?

# Chapter 4

## 'Living as Friends: seeking right relationships'

*'This is my commandment. That you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I have commanded you. I do not call you servants any longer ....; I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.'* (John 15:12-15)

*'From now on, therefore, we regard no-one from a human point of view ... So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends, and gave us the task of making others God's friends too'. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19) (Good News Bible, American Bible Society, 1976)*

In this Chapter we explore how we might live as friends of God and each other in response to the grace of God in Christ. it will include:

- how living as friends is an expression of our faithfulness to God;
- the nature and elements of friendship;
- in what ways sexuality and sexual expression are appropriately part of friendship;
- how as a community we provide a basic framework of values which nurtures just relationships and which in turn is enriched by such relationships.

In short this chapter explores how to 'do' friendship in response to God's grace.

### A Model of Friendship

- 4.1. The model for our friendship with God and one another is the way in which God in Christ befriends us, inviting us to participate in the new covenant.<sup>34</sup> Throughout history God's love for humankind is seen in the faithfulness which was always shown to the people of God. The Gospel reveals again that God is graciously disposed towards us in love.
- 4.2. The grace of God finds its clearest expression in the sending of Jesus for our salvation. 'God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8). God's love and acceptance of us comes before our deserving and calls us into new life. The Christian life is lived in response to God's grace and calling, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### An inclusive Friendship

- 4.3. In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus affirms that we are to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. He then answers the question: 'who is my neighbour?', with the story of the good Samaritan. In that story lies the challenge to recognise the foreigner, the 'enemy' as neighbour. This is a powerful picture of being a friend, to the extent of

34. See further discussion on the idea of 'friendship' in our relationship with God and God's relationship with us in Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1995 and Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, Fortress Press, 1987.

This is a powerful picture of being a friend, to the extent of befriending the 'enemy'. Jesus is saying, in effect, there are no longer enemies, there are only neighbours and friends and to be such is our calling and the gift we receive.

- 4.4. Furthermore, in much of Jesus' teaching and in his living he brought into the centre of the Kingdom those who were normally excluded:- the lame, the blind, the mentally disturbed, the leper. the hemorrhaging woman, little children, the poor and sexually outcast. The parable of the banquet is a graphic illustration of the bringing-in of the excluded ones (*Luke 14:15-24*). In the life of the Christian community we need to be mindful of those who are excluded in our day and invite them into the feast of life which is for all people.

### **The Heart of the Matter: Love**

- 4.5. When Jesus was asked what was the most important commandment?, he replied: Love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". (*Matthew 22:36-39*)
- 4.6. Many of us are familiar with the Greek words for love: agape, self-giving love; philia, friendship; eros, human desire; storge, family love. Agape is used consistently in the New Testament. The original Greek word had connotations of cold charity and was given fresh meaning by the New Testament writers. But although they wrote in Greek, they still tended to think in Hebraic terms.
- 4.7. There are three main Hebrew words for love; aheb (love); ahavah (election love) and hesed (covenant love). Whereas aheb describes a relationship, hesed is a dynamic love, God in action demonstrating loving-kindness in faithfulness to God's covenant. For this reason, when agape is used in the New Testament, hesed seems to be what the writers are seeking to translate.<sup>35</sup>
- 4.8. Some influential scholars in the 1950's<sup>36</sup> argued for a fundamental distinction between agape and every other kind of love.
- 4.9. The Task Group is persuaded that the Greek text of the Bible (Septuagint) does not support such a hard distinction between divine and human love. The Greek Bible, following the Hebrew Bible, has no word for sexual love as differentiated from other kinds of love. Agape is used hundreds of times to express the whole spectrum of human relationships.
- 4.10. Eros describes our human desire (including sexual desire but not confined to it) to reach out, a quest for communion with another, for connection. In this sense eros can be present in our desire to reach out and connect with God.
- 4.11. If the new commandment of Jesus is to be taken seriously the sharp distinction between the divine and human dimensions of love need to be challenged. Linking agape with its wide range of meanings in the Greek Bible of Christianity promises a revitalisation of our love for God; and a new means by which the divine love can transform and inform our efforts to love God and love our neighbours as we love

35. Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, Epworth Press, London, 1944, Ch. 5.

36. Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, (trans. Philip Watson), SPCK, London, 1957)

inform our efforts to love God and love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

- 4.12. Paul tells the church in Rome (*Romans 13:10*) that to love the other person is to fulfil the law. He spells out the nature of love in 1 Corinthians 13. We are used to hearing this in the context of the marriage service. While this is appropriate, Paul is writing of love as that which is to characterise the Christian community and for which each member is to strive. He lists the qualities of the kind of friendship referred to earlier. The nature of this love or friendship is expressed in seeking the good of the other, in patience, kindness, trust, honesty, forgiveness, faithfulness and service.

### **Called into a New Humanity**

- 4.13. As friends of Christ and a community of friends in Christ, we are a new people, a new humanity in relationship with God and one another. Our old humanity is reconstituted and re-directed in the love of Christ. All this becomes possible because God in Jesus Christ chose us to be friends to love others as God loves us (*2 Corinthians 5:18-19*). In the same way our sexuality, as an integral part of our humanity, is reconstituted and redirected. Our whole lives are directed to giving glory to God as faithful disciples. This has at least three implications.

- While we are not called to uphold a series of rules and regulations, we are freed for responsible living.
- We are not bound by community rules which do not honour the needs of uniquely different individuals. Rather as individuals drawn into the community in love for God and one another, we will discover our true humanity in Christ, 'in whom we live and move and have our being'. (*Acts 17:28*)
- God's love is for absolutely everyone and we are called to be a community which is open to all people. Jesus challenged the culture of his time in its rejection of foreigners, women, the mentally ill and the sick. He chose to be friends of those who were excluded. He restored people to wholeness and to the community. He touched the untouchables and accepted the ministrations of women (*Matthew 26:6-13, John 4:7-15*). He brought in a radically new understanding of the 'Reign of God', which he lived, taught and began in the lives of his followers.

- 4.14. Living as a new people in love and friendship is a radically different way of living. It is no soft option! It cuts across the individualism, self gratification and competitiveness which often typifies modern society. It is profoundly at odds with the way society tends to divide people into 'them and us', inviting suspicion and distrust, creating enemies rather than friends. Because of God's grace we are drawn to love others.

### **Living as Friends of God and one Another**

- 4.15. The Church needs to reflect on its own life, recognising those ways in which our life as a community of faith and as individuals mirrors society rather than reflecting the signs of our friendship with Christ. We need to hear again Christ's call to radical discipleship and seek God's strength to respond in penitence and faith.

- 4.16. It is as we hear that call and respond to it, that our lives take on the character of a community of friends of God and one another. If our faith works through love as Paul suggests in Galatians 5 then our lives begin to show the fruits of the Spirit:

*'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.'* (Galatians 5:22f)

- 4.17. That is the character of a community of friends of God and one other.

### **Elements of Right Relationship in Friendship**

- 4.18. What are the elements of friendship and right relationship that we value as a Christian community and seek to reflect in our living?

#### **Honesty**

- 4.19. Honesty is an important component of justice and truth in friendships. It is something we look for in our relationships with one another. Honesty involves being open to the expression of feelings. It also involves congruence in the expression of our feelings, speech and behaviour. Friendship is enhanced when people can share openly and listen to one another's feelings and thoughts. Couples who break a relationship often note dishonesty and secrecy as a problem.

#### **Trust**

- 4.20. God is the one we can trust absolutely. Knowing that we can trust God helps us to be more trustworthy and prepared to trust others. Good friendship is built on and is sustained by trust. It is at the heart of our understanding of 'covenant'. As trust increases people become more honest and vulnerable with one another. A breakdown of trust is frequently hard to heal.

#### **Faithfulness**

Faithfulness, like trust, is a key element in God's covenant with God's people. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Our ability to be faithful in relationships and friendship is possible because of God's faithfulness. We learn how to be faithful and how to enter into commitment because of our confidence in God's sustaining love. We dare to commit ourselves to marriage, to parenthood, to friendship, to community. We make deliberate decisions to persevere in our relationships.

#### **Equality and Mutuality**

- 4.22. Jesus is our model. He treated all people with respect, holding them to be equally loved, respected and judged by God. Paul also affirmed our equal standing in Christ (*Galatians 3:28*), as does the Marriage Service.<sup>37</sup> Equality involves the absence of domination and double standards.

<sup>37</sup>. *Uniting in Worship*  
Leaders Book, P. 381.

<sup>38</sup>. Geoff Scott, *'When Relationality Takes Centre Stage', in sexuality - Exploring the Issues*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 112.

- 4.23. As well as a mutual honouring of one another we look for the kind of mutual dependency empowerment which is experienced in a relationship between two people when each person goes beyond self to be present for the other, without either person being diminished. In such a relationship both people are enhanced.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>39</sup>. Karen Lebacqz,  
'Appropriate  
Vulnerability: A Sexual  
Ethic for Singles' in *The  
Christian Century*, May 6,  
1987.

### **Vulnerability**

- 4.24. The supreme model of someone giving themselves for the sake of the other or allowing themselves to become vulnerable, is God's gift in Jesus. Risking being vulnerable and offering oneself fully for the sake of another are qualities we look for in the Christian community. This is the friendship we have seen in Christ and involves the risk of being hurt.<sup>39</sup> To be vulnerable to another can also be regarded as an act of profound freedom. We are released from the protection and the security with which we have enclosed ourselves.

### **Freedom and Responsibility**

- 4.25. The linking of freedom and responsibility is part of our vision of a new people in Christ. We would expect to find both elements in our relationships with one another. God has given us freedom and we give it to one another. A good friendship allows each person to grow and retain their individuality, while each is enriched within the context of mutual commitment. We see this in God inviting us into friendship and allowing us in freedom to respond. We see it in God's reconciling love which entrusts us with the message of reconciliation available to all people. (*2 Corinthians 5:18*)

### **Setting Limits and Self Control**

- 4.26. The incarnation involved the self-limiting of God in order to be with us, as one of us. Part of the honouring of the other person requires us to set limits on our own needs and behaviour; that is, to exercise self control for the sake of the other and the good of the community. (*Romans 14:21*) In this way freedom and responsibility are brought together and we truly wait on one another.

### **Giving and Receiving Affection and Pleasure**

- 4.27. Enjoying being together, feeling free with the other and when separated, looking forward to being together, are all part of the warmth of friendship. Affection is a natural expression of our pleasure and delight in each other which nurtures the relationship. To hug and kiss a friend is part of the warmth and endearment of being friends. While the expression of affection may vary according to the culture, it is a part of our human nature and indeed is a deep need in all of us. How pleasure is experienced in sexuality will differ from person to person; gender too may be significant. For instance in love making, women and men tend to be aroused to sexual pleasure in different ways. However, care needs to be taken not to draw firm conclusions in this regard.

### **Communication**

- 4.28. Some sexual activity is culturally conditioned and therefore can be learnt- The important thing is that couples need to communicate their sexual needs and be patient with each other. Good skills need to be learnt and practised to resolve conflicts and deepen our understanding of each other.

### **Discovering intimacy**

- 4.29. As these qualities of friendship find expression between individuals and within the faith community, intimacy can be discovered. We recognise it as a particular experience of depth and closeness in relationship. Intimate relationships are built on trust, good communication and on the willingness to be vulnerable with each

other. Intimate relationships do not necessarily include genital sexual activity.

### **Sexuality as Part of Relationships**

- 4.30. As an integral part of our personhood, our sexuality is part of all our relating and friendships though expressed in different ways. While warm affection may be appropriate in all our friendships, more intimate sexual expressions belong with the more intimate relationships. That is, there needs to be a congruence between the nature of sexual expression and the depth of trust, intimacy and commitment of the friendship.

### **Sexual Passion and Setting Boundaries**

- 4.31. Sexual passion and the desire for the beloved are part of God's good gift of sexuality, which moves towards the joy and the delight of sexual intimacy. The security of a committed relationship is the most appropriate context for sexual union.

- 4.32. The intensity of passion and desire needs to be tempered according to the nature and depth of relationship. This requires sensitivity and open communication between a couple in deciding how far it is appropriate to go. Such a discussion is not easy in the heat of the moment, but needs to take place openly and honestly as the relationship grows. It requires the willingness to listen to each other's feelings and needs to exercise self-control for the good of the other and the growing relationship. Another aspect of this issue of setting limits is to be found in the concept of 'waiting'.

### **Waiting with Patience**

- 4.33. As a community of Christ's friends we need to recapture the important spiritual discipline of 'waiting', giving the time and space to wait on God and the other person. This gentle approach to our friendships is strongly linked with our willingness to limit our own needs and behaviour in order to allow space for the friendship to grow and flourish. Including sexual expression as part of this gentle 'waiting' approach enables relationships to grow in depth. This concept of 'waiting' is one which cuts across the expectation of instant gratification in today's society. In seeking to model this in community life and in individuals' friendships, the Church has something important to offer to all people and to the society as a whole.

### **Repentance, Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

- 4.34. We recognise that we live in a world of brokenness, to which we contribute by our sinfulness and by which we are hurt. We fail to live as friends of God and as a community of friends. In our sinfulness, we can be guilty of dishonesty, selfishness, betrayal of trust and an unwillingness to risk being deeply open to each other. God's love enables us to seek God's grace to forgive when we are hurt and to seek God's forgiveness in genuine repentance when we have hurt someone else. In forgiving and being forgiven we grow in love. Forgiving is one path to healing; repenting and taking responsibility for our actions is another. When that happens forgiveness is no longer cheap, but can be given and received as part of the healing process. We need as a Church to create opportunities in our life together and in our worship, to give expression to this

healing process. The process of confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation may be enhanced if it includes a liturgical act designed for the particular situation.

#### **Sin, Abuse, Exclusion and Brokenness**

- 4.35. Sadly many people do not experience, in the family, their marriage or in their personal friendships, the quality of deep friendship we have described. The sin and brokenness of our society and its structures, of individual lives and of our life as a Church cuts us off from God and one another. The violence depicted in films and TV programs is a reflection of the violence in the life of society and its individual members. The economic pressures placed upon people have a way of poisoning relationships as does the prevailing drive for competition and individualism.
- 4.36. There are those who are too abused and hurt to risk deep commitment and friendship. Many do not have the models of right relationships or the skills to enable the building of fulfilling and just relationships. This central aspect of living is not formally taught, it is learned from our experience as children. Then there is our sinfulness expressed in self-centredness, selfishness and the wrong use of power, which seeks to control and manipulate people rather than enhance and empower the other.

#### **Role of Power in Relationships**

- 4.37. From the responses to the Interim Report (op. cit.) many people do not understand the role of power in relationships. The misuse of power inflicts violence on people, mainly on women and children, though not exclusively so. While the misuse of power is clear in abusive relationships, rape, incest and pederasty, power is also misused in more subtle ways to intimidate, frighten, coerce and demean. These forms of mental, emotional, verbal, economic and psychological abuse violate a person's spirituality when it occurs within a family or the faith community. This is the very antithesis of the way of Christ and the picture of mutual empowerment we have tried to draw earlier in this chapter.

#### **The impact of Child Sexual Abuse**

- 4.38. Many people are too abused and hurt to risk deep commitment and friendship. In the 1990's childhood sexual abuse has emerged as a significant social issue. Mostly occurring in families, fathers and other older males dominate as perpetrators. (Stranger abuse forms only 1% of cases.) The effect on children is devastating, interfering with their normal bonding, confusing them over issues of right and wrong, undermining their capacity for trust in adult life. The adult sexual intrusion into childhood leaves the child no moral guide for future behaviour. Encounters with authority figures may get sexualised in later life without any understanding of the underlying motivations.
- 4.39. The adult abused in childhood may suffer serious psychiatric conditions. 'Dissociation', which is a protective form of forgetting, may help the child survive. But in later life, it may underlie a whole range of psychiatric problems from eating disorders to severe neuroses and personality disorders. Apart from stunting their emotional and spiritual growth, childhood sexual abuse may also

lead victims into becoming perpetrators themselves.

### **Sexual Exploitation of Children**

- 4.40. In the past, the violation of children for adult gratification was termed 'paedophilia' (love of children). Now we name this aberration as 'sexual abuse of children', one of the many forms of violence committed against children and adolescents. As a society, we have become more aware of endemic child pornography and prostitution through publicity surrounding tourism in Asia organised by Australians. World-wide networks of child pornography via the Internet are a cause for concern.

### **The Role of the Church**

- 4.41. The Church has an important role in this.
- We must speak out against all forms of abusive, violent and predatory behaviours such as rape, stalking, abuse in all its forms, the ongoing trades of pornography and prostitution and the sexual exploitation of children wherever these occur.
  - The Church needs to model right and just friendships in its own life and maintain the quality of community life as an expression of the Gospel. It must name the sinfulness within its own community life and act with compassion towards those who have become its victims.
  - Child abusers are known to infiltrate child care agencies and youth organisations for their own purposes. We need to be vigilant about our choice of the adult leaders of children so that we can help create safe places for children and young people.
  - The Church needs to pastor people who have been abused and those who are abusers, always working for justice and healing. Within the Church community, we offer an environment of wholeness and nurture where people begin to trust again.

### **Right Relationships as an Expression of Community**

40. 'Marriage Service' in *Uniting in Worship*; Dorothy Lee, 'Freedom, Spirituality and the Body', in *Freedom and Entrapment*, P. 51.

- 4.42. Right relationship is essential in building community. The integrity of the individual begins with seeing themselves in community. In other words the basic unit of society is not the individual, but the individual in community. For the Christian that entails seeing the individual in the community under God. We need to beware lest our actions become a cause of stumbling to others. All relationships, including our intimate relationships, have an effect on the community.<sup>40</sup> We need to be open to the challenge and discipline of the faith community. This is both our limitation and responsibility. (Romans 14)
- 4.43. It is within the community that all our relationships and friendships are worked out. Not only are our friendships nurtured by the Christian community, our relationships and friendships enhance community. In other words, how we 'do' friendship is an essential element in the building of community, both in the faith community and in society as a whole. The community is weakened when people are excluded and abused and when power is misused and trust dishonoured. The issue of right relationships and of faithful friendships is a community issue. It is not simply a private matter between the individuals involved. This places enormous

responsibility on the community to provide a framework which encourages and nurtures good friendships. It also means that the Uniting Church has a responsibility to work against the structures and forces within itself and society that divide and put people at enmity with one another. This is a response to God's call of reconciliation made possible in Jesus Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:16-21*). In such ways we may be part of a ministry of healing and wholeness for all people.

Note: Full report on "Uniting Sexuality and Faith" can be found on the link below:

<http://nat.uca.org.au/resources/pdf/UnitingSexuality.pdf>

Also Note this is a pdf file and it might take couple of minutes to fully download.