

# a la carte

Daily menu for the 10th Uniting Church Assembly, July 12-19 2003

**Issue 6: Friday, July 17, 2003**

**See also: <http://nat.uca.org.au/assembly2003>**

## Drayton: pray our search for unity will not be in vain

The Uniting Church's 10th National Assembly today voted to accept recommendations that will allow individual presbyteries to accept people for ordination, candidature for ministry or placement in ministry on a case-by-case basis.

The recommendation reaffirms a presbytery's right to make its own decision on matters of ordination and placement of ministers. It is a clear statement reflecting previous decisions made by the Assembly on the unity and diversity of the Uniting Church.

This recommendation (proposal 84) is seen by many as opening the door to the acceptance of a homosexual person for ordination or placement in ministry.

The President of the Uniting Church, Rev Dr Dean Drayton, said the vote was a significant event in the life of the Uniting Church because "it clarified the situation in the church and sought to maintain the unity of the church, by acknowledging our diversity of understanding and interpretation".

"Every presbytery will retain its own function as a council of the church," he said.

"Every congregation maintains its right to make its own decision on its own leadership.

"The Assembly has decided that we are a diverse church, we have great and genuinely held differences, but instead of allowing these differences to divide us, we will hold together in something greater — our love of God and our love of the Uniting Church itself.

"I know some will be unhappy. Others will celebrate. I pray that our search for unity will not be in vain.

"It is my hope that the wider church will see what we have done as a showing a maturity in Christ.

"Instead of one view prevailing over the other, we agree to acknowledge that there are differences of interpretation and understanding and seek learn to live with each other



*Assembly: aware of many eyes watching*

despite those differences.

"The importance of the role and function of each presbytery has been greatly affirmed by this proposal. No one can tell them what to do or think.

"The Basis of Union (a foundational document of the Uniting Church) found ways to bring three different points of view of three different denominations together. We are keeping to that journey, seeking to live with our diversity under our common love of God."

"It is also important to emphasise the case-by-case element of this decision. No blanket statements have been made. Individual presbyteries will deal with each individual case. Local wisdom under the love of God will prevail.

"I believe this decision, after initial discussion, will allow the Uniting Church to move forward after almost 20 years of debate. It will free us to get on with the great commission before us: to proclaim the Gospel, to witness to the love of God, to befriend and help those in need and to worship in faith, hope and love.

"During the course of this Assembly I will send a pastoral letter to all congregations across Australia, informing them of this decision and its implications.

"I will continue to pray for the assurance of God's love for us all in Christ's Uniting Church in Australia," Dr Drayton said.

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## Ministers: Live long and prosper?

The Beneficiary Fund, superannuation for ministers, is having a problem due to the increased longevity of ministers. Statistically ministers live longer than any other occupation group.

Robert Runco, the executive director of the Beneficiary Fund, thinks this may be due to the continued active involvement of ministers after retirement.

"When I started in this position two and a half years ago, I was told I was to look after retired ministers," he said.

"Trouble is, I haven't found any yet!"

Another difficulty for the Fund is the age of ministers at entry level. The average age is now over 40.

This late entry means the whole configuration of the Fund needs to change if the Fund is to meet tomorrow's needs.

The Fund has identified three options for restructuring and these will be considered by the August Assembly Standing Committee.

## History book a tribute to Susan and Bill

The book *Uniting Church in Australia – The first twenty five years* was launched last night. Written by 11 authors, this book discusses and celebrates the movement of each synod's history.

Editor Rev Dr Bill Emilsen said the book would help to preserve our history to help people with 'amnesia' in the church, help those who read it be proud of what the church has achieved in such a short period of time and to give the present and future generation a greater understanding of the Uniting Church.

Rev Prof James Haire launched the book and encouraged congregations of the Uniting Church to read it to gain a greater understanding of the church as he believes that "you cannot understand the church if you do not know its history."

Heartfelt tributes were given to Susan Emilsen who died while the book was being written. Rev Dr Dean Drayton expressed that it was her desire to have the book completed and thanked Bill Emilsen for his courage and commitment to the book.



*Professor James Haire, with chapter authors Rev Dr Ian Breward and Ms Julia Pitman at the launch of The Uniting Church in Australia -- the first 25 years, edited by William and Susan Emilsen.*

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## What are right relationships?

The term has been described as everything from "short-hand" to "giving the impression that it's about deception and unfaithfulness". Some people see it as the opposite to CISAFIM (celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage).

But the term, "right relationships", had a key part in yesterday's decision on sexuality.

It's also likely to have an important part in any debate about a concern that came out yesterday – that the Uniting Church might one day be considering the blessing of same-sex partnerships.

In fact, both those issues have been alive in the Uniting Church for the last six years.

"Right relationships" were outlined in 1997 in *Uniting Sexuality and Faith*, the report of the Assembly task group on sexuality. That report also had a recommendation that the church explore the blessing of same-sex relationships.

The present moderator of the Victorian and Tasmanian synod, Rev Alistair Macrae, was the man who chaired that task group (1992-97), and he stands by both those parts of the report.

"'Right relationships' is by no means open slather, an opportunity to encourage promiscuity and fly-by-night affairs. In fact, it sets the moral bar very high for people,

whatever their sexual orientation," he says.

"It means conducting our relationships, whether they are friendships or more intimate, according to the gospel's core values. And what the [sexuality] report would call covenantal relationships, such as marriage, need to reflect the faithfulness of God."

In a chapter entitled "Living as friends: seeking right relationships", the 1997 report outlined the elements of right relationships in both friendship and community.

These included honesty, trust, faithfulness, equality and mutuality, vulnerability, freedom and responsibility, setting limits and self-control, giving and receiving affection and pleasure.

Among its comments on these:

"Knowing that we can trust God helps us to be more trustworthy and prepared to trust others ... We learn how to be faithful and how to enter into commitment because of our confidence in God's sustaining love ... The linking of freedom and responsibility is part of our vision of a new people in Christ."

Mr Macrae says the term "right relationships" arose as the task group searched for "a vocabulary and a context for gay and lesbian people to construct relationships that reflect the values of the gospel and the faithfulness of God".

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## UIW2: Rich imagery, but not too flowery

The new Uniting Church liturgical resource *Uniting in Worship 2*, described in detail but not launched at the 10th Assembly, will be cheaper and more diverse than the original.

Rev Dr Paul Walton from Theology and Discipleship said the new publication would take multiple forms – it will be a book, a CD-ROM and a website. The book will be smaller, around the size of the present UIW People's Book. There will also be new editions of the booklets which have been popular in Uniting Churches for decades – Holy Communion, Baptism, and Marriage.

The new model will be much cheaper for congregations,

as only one copy would be required per congregation, rather than an expensive Leader's Book and multiple copies of the People's Book. Congregations will be able to reproduce the Service of the Lord's Day through a variety of means: OHT, data projection, or photocopied handouts.

UIW2 will showcase a variety of liturgical styles, and use a wider range of imagery and names for God. Dr Walton used the term "middle register language", which he said would be more descriptive and poetic, but not too flowery. He cited liturgical writers such as Dorothy McRae-McMahon and Bruce Prewer as examples of this style.