

# Weaving a New Cloth

## Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together

### Preamble

This document proposes a framework for local cooperation between Anglican and Uniting churches throughout Australia.

Local cooperation is the most promising avenue for ecumenism today, with growing numbers of congregations working and worshipping together. Increasingly, it is here that fruitful “ecumenical space” is to be found, in which different Christian communities can walk together in the way of Christ, and each discover the gifts the other tradition has to offer.<sup>i</sup>

The Joint Working Group offers this framework in the hope that it will assist both our churches to encourage and support cooperation at the local level. In doing so, we build upon the work of previous dialogues, trusting that the benefit of many years’ conversation will be more fully realized in time to come.

This document honours each church’s understanding of the relationship that can exist between us, setting out what is possible, and what is not, within current constraints. At present, this includes eucharistic hospitality but precludes formal intercommunion and the mutual recognition of ordained ministries. It seems to us that this is a constructive ecumenical step that can be taken now, in openness to whatever future directions might emerge for conversation out of a strengthened experience of locally shared worship and mission.

### A Biblical Vision of Christian Unity

The unity of Christians is a gift from God before it is a task for the church. Our unity is in Christ. He is our peace, creating in himself one new humanity across humankind’s divisions, reconciling Jew and Gentile to God in one body through the cross (Eph. 2:14-16). In Christ we are built together spiritually, across our differences, into a dwelling place for God (2:22). This is a *spiritual* unity, grounded in the unity and mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son and in the unity of believers with the Son and the Father (John 17:20-21).

However, the unity of believers with each other, for which Jesus prays, a unity in diversity, is also a *visible* unity. Moreover, not an end in itself, it is a *missional* unity.<sup>ii</sup>

The unity of Christians serves the mission of the triune God: that the world may believe that the Father has sent the Son (John 17:21) and the Spirit (John 14:26). To fail to make this unity visible and concrete is to dishonour the gift of God in Christ.

All Christian churches are called to give expression to this gift. Together with other churches,<sup>iii</sup> our two churches have pledged, through the “Covenanting Together” process of the National Council of Churches in Australia, “to explore such further steps as will be necessary to make more clearly visible the unity of all Christian people in this country”. The possibilities outlined in this document, approved by our two churches at national level, are significant steps for Anglican and Uniting parishes and congregations to consider taking together in their local worship, education and mission.

### Theological Affirmations

1. Each of our churches stands in the continuity of the apostolic faith, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

2. Each of our churches is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Acknowledging our failure to enact fully our calling, both our churches witness faithfully to the gospel and seek to be more fully engaged in God's mission in the world.
3. In each of our churches the Holy Spirit gives to the whole people of God gifts for the upbuilding of the church and for its continuation in the mission of Jesus Christ.
4. The ordained ministry in both our churches is given by God as an instrument of grace, notwithstanding our different understandings of it. By this ministry, the people of God are called to faith, strengthened to witness to the gospel and empowered to serve in hope and love.
5. In each of our churches the word of God is faithfully preached and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are duly administered in accordance with each church's tradition.
6. Personal, communal and collegial oversight (*episcopate*) is exercised in both our churches, albeit in different forms, to serve the church's unity and its faithfulness to the gospel.

### **Forms of Cooperation**

Local inter-church covenants across Australia give expression to the commitment of church people to make visible the unity that we have in Christ.

Possibilities listed below are not sequential but have developed out of particular circumstances—some out of ecumenical commitment, others because of changed conditions. In all situations, consideration must be given to every aspect and implication of cooperating arrangements and the different approvals and agreements required for different levels of cooperation.

#### *Hospitality*

Hospitality can take many forms. Anglican and Uniting Church members are welcome to attend services in each other's churches. Eucharistic hospitality may be offered to baptized and communicant members of each other's churches. Hospitality can also include the sharing of buildings, and shared activities are encouraged as common witness and mission in local communities.

#### *Shared Witness*

A stronger visible expression of the unity we share as a gift from God is seen as we deepen our relationships in shared worship, bible study and fellowship groups, and these occasions give witness to the Christian faith we hold in common. Formal shared events are more meaningful when planned by representatives of both church communities.

#### *Shared Ministry in Mission*

In some circumstances, Anglican and Uniting churches decide to share resources to better provide ministry and pastoral services. These resources may include staff or volunteers, buildings or finances. Ministry may be for specific communities, e.g. chaplaincies in schools or aged care, or for the wider community within a specific geographic area.

The vision for such shared ministry may come from the local community, or the missional imperative from the leadership of either church in a specific area. Where the impetus comes from local congregations, plans for these shared ministries are presented to the relevant Anglican Diocesan Bishop and the relevant Uniting Church Presbytery.

### *Joint Congregations*

The establishment of a joint congregation, i.e. one congregation made up of members of the two ecclesial traditions, requires the agreement of local councils of both churches' parishioners and the approval of the appropriate governance within both the Anglican and Uniting churches. Each of the original congregations retains its separate identity, membership and links (spiritual, doctrinal, sacramental, liturgical and financial) to its church, according to the provisions and degree of collaboration. They share resources such as church buildings and ministries, and unite in local mission.

Agreement must be reached within the Anglican Parish Council and Uniting Church Congregation and Church Council. Approval is also required from the relevant Anglican Diocesan Bishop and the relevant Uniting Church Presbytery. Depending on circumstances, approval of the relevant Property Trusts may also be required.

### *Planned Common Witness*

In areas of new growth or rejuvenation it is possible for both churches to work together to construct buildings for shared usage, common witness and ministry. Constitutional issues of both churches must be addressed, but the witness of the unity we have in Christ to the wider community presents opportunities and challenges which are invaluable.

### **Conclusion**

Arguably the most significant development in the last decade or so for ecumenism has been the development of the concept of Receptive Ecumenism. At the heart of this endeavour is the conviction that the primary ecumenical responsibility is to ask not "What do the other traditions first need to learn from us?" but "What do we need to learn from them?". If our two churches were asking this question seriously and acting upon it, then we would be moving in ways that would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into more intimate relationship.

The Joint Working Group offers "Weaving a New Cloth: Anglican and Uniting Churches Working Together" for the prayerful consideration of our two churches. As a further step on the journey, and building on the work already undertaken between our respective churches, we remain convinced that the next steps outlined in this proposal will offer tangible evidence of our commitment to the relational unity which is both the desire and the command of our Lord (John 17:20-23). We commend the report to the General Synod of the Anglican Church and the National Assembly of the Uniting Church.

Rt. Rev. John Parkes  
*for the Joint Working Group*

Rev. Prof. Christiaan Mostert

### **Notes**

### **For Further Information**

#### **Covenanting**

<http://ncca.org.au/departments/faith-unity/covenanting>

<http://toorak.unitingchurch.org.aboutus> and

<http://saintjohnstoorak.org/#/about-st-johns-toorak/community>

More Covenants and Agreements are listed in 'When Churches Join' (see below).

#### **Shared Witness**

<http://www.worlddayofprayeraustralia.org>

<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/faith-unity> for 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity' resources

### **Shared Ministry**

<http://www.pastoraljournal.findaus.com>

<http://www.ecumenical.ucaqld.com.au/ecumenical-schools>

<http://www.bendigoanglican.org.au/parishes/central-mallee>

<http://www.anglicanrock.org.au/churches/winton.html>

<http://www.bathurstanglican.org.au/parishes/canowindra>

### **Joint Congregations**

<http://www.ucalpine.org.au/history.html> and

<http://snowyanglicanparish.weebly.com/>

<http://www.cckensington.org.au/history.html>

<http://www.wa.uca.org.au/mthawthorn/about>

(The search for St. Peter and Emmaus Church on the Anglican website leads to this UCA link.)

### **Planned Ecumenical Witness**

<http://www.seafordecumenical.org.au>

<http://www.emmanuel.unitingchurch.org.au> (the website listed by both the Anglican Diocese and the Uniting Presbytery)

### **Further Resources:**

- **Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity In Mission (AMICUM) Report**, due to be made public in 2014. Access to this report will be publicized in due course.
- The **Trinity Declaration and Code of Practice** for Local Co-operation in Victoria between the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia.  
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/unity/when-churches-join/item/953-developing-ecumenical-co-operating-partnerships>
- **When Churches Join** (a good summary of issues that arise as Christian communities begin to discuss developing ecumenical cooperating partnerships, plus listings of Covenants and Agreements).  
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/unity/when-churches-join>
- **The Gift of Each Other; Learning From Other Christians, a Parish Workbook on Receptive Ecumenism**, published by the New South Wales Ecumenical Council, 2013.

[www.nswec.org.au](http://www.nswec.org.au)

## Membership of the Joint Working Group

### *Anglican*

Rt. Rev. John Parkes (co-chair)  
Helen Baddeley  
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### *Uniting*

Rev. Prof. Christiaan Mostert (co-chair)  
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<sup>i</sup> The recent encouraging development of “Receptive Ecumenism” is helpfully discussed in Gerard Kelly, “A New Ecumenical Wave”, public lecture, National Council of Churches Forum, Canberra, 12 July 2010

([www.ncca.org.au/files/Forum/7th/Documents/Ecumenical\\_Address.pdf](http://www.ncca.org.au/files/Forum/7th/Documents/Ecumenical_Address.pdf)).

<sup>ii</sup> The emphasis on the church’s unity as spiritual, visible and missional is borrowed from the ‘Biblical Reflection’, Section 3 of the draft report of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (AMICUM), 2013.

<sup>iii</sup> The following Churches have signed the Future Pledge of the Covenanting Document: the Anglican Church of Australia, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Churches of Christ in Australia, the Congregational Federation of Australia, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, the Indian Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Mar Thoma Church, the Religious Society of Friends, the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Salvation Army and the Uniting Church in Australia.

[www.ncca.org.au/files/Departments/Faith\\_and\\_Unity/Covenanting/2010\\_July\\_Australian\\_Churches\\_Covenanting\\_Together.pdf](http://www.ncca.org.au/files/Departments/Faith_and_Unity/Covenanting/2010_July_Australian_Churches_Covenanting_Together.pdf)