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The 15th Assembly decision on marriage sparked many conversations across the Uniting Church. These papers have been written as a resource to those ongoing conversations.

5 What is unity in diversity?

Summary Sentence:

Unity in diversity is a visible expression of our discipleship and our shared witness to the risen Christ, thus reflecting Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) even and particularly when diverse differences arise that relate to doctrine, belief and practice.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the Christian community as the body of Christ. Using this metaphor, Paul demonstrates that unity is made up of many diverse parts, yet all these different parts form the one body of Christ. The Christian community is made up of diverse members from different cultures and walks of life. The challenge the church continues to face since its early beginnings is keeping the integrity of an authentic Christ-centered community in the face of diverse differences, especially when those differences lead to conflict.

Through Christ and the baptism by the one Spirit we become and are diverse members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). Through baptism we are adopted into a wider kinship in Christ, and held together by a common faith in the Triune God. "The Christian church is called to be a diverse community in difference where our differences are sustained but held in unity in the Spirit of Christ."¹ Our baptism calls us beyond the confines of our exclusive self-defining cultural labels, denominational traditions, or theological categories by which we are prone to define ourselves over and against other Christians.

Unity should not be conflated with uniformity or the flattening of differences. "The unity, which God offers the Church in Christ, is a unity that allows, endorses and enhances difference."² The gift does not imply uniformity, but realigns us to Jesus Christ and the core values of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed.

"The Uniting Church receives its unity from God, as both gift and calling"³ and "confesses that Jesus is head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity" (Basis # 3). In order to serve that end "the church is called 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 to bear witness to himself" (Basis # 3).

The "call to union – then and now – is a call to surrender our self-limiting identities that so often claim primacy in our self-understanding and our relationship with others within the body of Christ."⁴ Unity in diversity is a visible expression of our discipleship and our shared witness to the risen Christ, thus reflecting Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) even and particularly when diverse differences arise that relate to doctrine, belief and practice.

¹ Assembly Working Groups on Doctrine and Worship, "Called to a Community of Difference: A Uniting Church Charter" in *Building on the Basis: Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia*, edited by Christopher C. Walker (Sydney: Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2012), 150.

² "Called to a Community of Difference," 149.

³ "Called to a Community of Difference," 149.

⁴ Geoff Thompson, *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many: Theology provoked by the Basis of Union*, (Northcote: UAP, Melbourne, 2016), 7.

The biblical witness

Quotable Quote

Connections

Texts: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26; Galatians 3:25-29

Comment: Notice that both Paul's image of the body and his insistence on baptismal identity cut right across prevailing social structures and social norms and entail a vision of mutual accountability.

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"Called to a Community of Difference," in Building on the Basis: Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia, edited by Christopher C. Walker (Sydney: Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2012), 150.

Reflecting on all the above material, what do you hear and see which connects with your own journey of faith and that of your particular church community?

Acknowledgement:

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