

## **UNITING CHURCH VALUES STATEMENT IN RELATION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

The Uniting Church believes that God has given us the gift of the Spirit to “constantly correct that which is erroneous” in our life (Basis of Union, Para 18). Therefore, we will not hide from the truth, however painful that may be, and we will seek, with compassion and humility, to address whatever issues and challenges may emerge for us. We will say “sorry” to anyone who was sexually abused when in our care and, in consultation with those so affected, actively seek for ways to make amends for what happened in the past and identify how we can best offer support into the future. In all of this we are guided by the Word of God, remembering the teaching of the Apostle Paul: “Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable....think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).

From the beginning of our life together as the people of God within the Uniting Church in Australia, we have sought through prayer, and a spirit of consensus, to discern what it means to confess Jesus as Lord and Head over all things (Basis of Union, Para 3). At the time of Inauguration, the Assembly spoke to the nation in a statement that has guided and encouraged us ever since to be a church that honours Christ in all that we say and do. The statement declared, in part, that “we affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, and the proclamation of truth and justice....We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur” (Statement to the Nation, National Assembly, June 1977).

To adopt such a stance in the life of our nation means that we must be willing to examine our own motives and behaviour and be open to accept the close scrutiny of others. In that regard the Uniting Church welcomes the decision of the Federal Government to establish a Royal Commission on the sexual abuse of children in both public and church institutions, and pledges itself to cooperate fully and honestly with the process the Commission will implement. The sexual abuse of children is criminal behaviour that is totally abhorrent and unacceptable.

+ + + + +

### **Background commentary on the Uniting Church in Australia**

#### **History & Structure**

- The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) came into being on 22 June 1977 and was formed by the joining of the Methodist Church of Australasia, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Congregational Union of Australia. All Methodist, most Congregational and a majority of Presbyterian congregations joined the Uniting Church.
- Presbyterian Congregations not wishing to join the Uniting Church remain as the Presbyterian Church of Australia. In 1977 designated schools and agencies were identified to remain within the Presbyterian Church of Australia.
- All other associated activities, agencies and schools of these denominations became part of the Uniting Church
- The Uniting Church is the third largest Christian denomination in Australia (approximately 5% of the population claim adherence)
- The Uniting Church speaks for and accepts responsibility for all Uniting Church congregations and agencies prior to and since Union.
- The polity / structure of the Uniting Church is based on inter-related councils (Assembly - national, Synod, Presbytery – regional and Congregations - local) but there is a single legal entity in each Synod including schools and agencies. In some cases agencies and schools are incorporated but remain under the Regulations of the Uniting Church.

#### **Theology and Ethos**

- The Uniting Church is a Protestant denomination drawing on the catholic (“universal”), reformed, evangelical traditions.
- It espouses a strong Christian ethical and social justice approach, holds that relationships are vital, and seeks to resolve matters through discussion to achieve consensus.

- Our foundational document is **The Basis of Union**. This brief document (18 paragraphs) sets out the Uniting Church's understanding of theology and polity. It is from this document that the Uniting Church's social and ethical values flow.
- At the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting Church in June 1977, the first President, Rev Dr Davis McCaughey read out a **Statement to the Nation** setting out the commitments of the Uniting Church to the wider community and the nation.
- The Uniting Church seeks to engage with contemporary thought through scholarship and scientific enquiry. In this way it sharpens its understanding of the will and purposes of God for the times in which it lives. Thus it is open to God's will as to how it needs to acknowledge its failures, apologize and seek justice for all.

#### **In the context of the Royal Commission**

- The President speaks for the whole Church, Moderators in each Synod speak on behalf of the Synod, Presbyteries and Congregations and designated spokespersons speak on behalf of particular agencies and schools.
- The Uniting Church has established National and Synod Engagement and Response Task Groups to facilitate the communication between the Commission and the Church. On behalf of the Uniting Church the Assembly General Secretary is responsible for the National Engagement and Response Task Group.
- The Uniting Church offers support to survivors of child sexual abuse and assistance to the Commission.

*Approved by the Assembly Standing Committee, March 2013*