



EDITORIAL

A stark challenge,
with no waffling

The Reforming Alliance is preparing to challenge the Uniting Church's official policy of indiscriminating inclusiveness at the Eleventh Assembly next year. RA will move to have the Assembly reaffirm "the sexual teaching and practice of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, as attested by Scripture."

It will present the Assembly with a six-point confessional statement, the first of which states: "We believe that God created us as male and female to live in freedom and unity with each other by being faithful to our male or female gender (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-24)."

The statement makes no provision for waffling about kindness, understanding or sleight of hand with biblical texts. The proposed motion is a stark challenge to the current surge of church opinion which would grant normality to homosexuality in all its forms. See p. 8 for full text.

Since most Uniting Church presbyteries and synods have adopted the inclusiveness agenda, the RA faces an uphill task. This is why the RA executive is urging all its affiliated individuals and congregations to bring the RA proposal, using the same form of words, to their presbyteries for submission to the Assembly.

Based on biblical texts from Genesis to Ephesians, the motion affirms that "sexual intercourse should be expressed solely within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, which is ... honoured by its unique likeness to Christ's relationship to the Church." Homosexual practices are described as "contrary to the clear witness of Scripture to our creation by God as male and female".

Homosexual practices are said to "harm the eucharistic fellowship of the Church as the Body of Christ." In the same vein "the Church's solidarity with the world in sin (Rom. 3,23) and gratitude for the world's reconciliation in Christ, commits her: to speak Christ's word of mercy and friendship to any person ... tempted by

(continued on p. 2)

Reformation or division:
a grim choice faces
the Uniting Church

The 2005 national RA conference, July 12 to 14 at Lincoln College, 45 Brougham Place, N. Adelaide, 5006

This year's conference will be a strategic meeting in the history of the Uniting Church, as the last national gathering of the Alliance before the 2006 Assembly. Partly to strengthen a common resolve to challenge Resolution 84, and partly to confront the church's drift from traditional biblical standards, the conference will allow members to develop a strong voice on issues arising at the Assembly.

Following the success of last year's event, Adelaide 2005 promises to build on that achievement with a program of prayer, worship, business and inspiring addresses.

Guest speakers Dr. Neil and Mrs. Briar Whitehead from New Zealand and Pastor Ron Brookman from Sydney will bring a wealth of experience and information. Neil and Briar Whitehead have for the past 15 years made a careful study of the scientific evidence on homosexuality. Dr. Whitehead is a research scientist with a PhD in biochemistry. Mrs. Whitehead is a writer. They dispute current views that homosexuality is genetic, inherent or fixed.

Pastor Ron Brookman, a former Uniting Church minister, has come out of the gay life-style and now runs 'Living Waters', a counseling and support service for people experiencing gender confusion. He is a lay leader with a healing ministry in a Uniting Church congregation in Sydney.

Dr. Whitehead will speak on 'Why activists act' and 'My genes did NOT make me do it'. Mrs. Whitehead's address is titled 'It can happen to the nicest people: understanding the causes of homosexuality'. Pastor Brookman's Tuesday evening address is on 'The healing journey out of the homosexual life style'. At the rally he will give a testimony on 'Coming out'.

RA chairman Dr. Max Champion will speak on 'Agenda for a Confessing Church' and 'More than a single issue'. Professor Brian Hill, the Rev. Rod James and the Rev. Ivan Kirk will also lead worship and Bible studies.

The conference is for all RA members and friends of the movement. Full registration of \$150 includes all meals and a single room with shared facilities. Member congregations of RA are urged to send at least one delegate to Adelaide. Those who register will be advised about proposals and voting procedures before the conference. People may register for the whole program or selected day or evening sessions.

(See page 8 for registration form).

homosexual practice and to offer them counselling and pastoral care when they experience temptation, hostility, illness or bereavement.”

Further, the Church is committed to “invite people practising homosexuality to experience Christ’s freedom by abandoning behaviour which is contrary to the clear witness of Scripture (Gal. 5, 16-25)” .. and to “not normalise homosexual practices within the Church by ordaining, commissioning or inducting into the ministries of the Church those practising homosexuality.” The blessing or solemnising of homosexual unions is likewise prohibited.

The RA proposal is an uncompromising rejection of opinions freely accepted in the corridors of Uniting Church policy making. It does not, however, lack compassion or concern for the difficulties faced by people drawn into the homosexual culture.

What is deemed by some to be remorseless homophobia is a recognition that far larger issues are at stake than the ‘rights’ of a small percentage of the general population, and an even smaller number within the church. The RA wants to encourage the church to exercise its integrity for the sake of society, rather than be swayed by society’s agenda. The RA understands that the first duty of church officials is not to support secular trends but to proclaim and safeguard the gospel.

So far they have failed in that duty. By using concepts like right relationships they give the false impression that they are referring to biblical ethics based on the righteousness and mercy of God.

The result is to make the church into a community that tolerates all distinctions, including private sexual preferences. Claiming the naturalness of homosexual relations they have gutted the tradition of church discipline.

The RA proposal carries an obvious price for the Uniting Church. The Assembly could endorse the RA resolution only by disengaging itself from our culture’s obsession with sexuality, and by refusing to take sides in a global movement whose primary aim is not Christian charity but unfettered sexual individualism.

The RA will challenge the next Assembly to step back from that fatal path, or face an uncertain and disastrous future.

Schism enters the vocabulary of dissent over R84

Alan Crawford’s confessional declaration

For the first time since 1977, schism is being talked about not as an impossibility, not even as unlikely, but as probable. Those who name the word do so not as a threat but through necessity, for the sake of an outcome more important even than a denomination’s survival.

Opponents of official policy on sexuality are engaged in clarifying their own position and explaining that their stand is based on confession of faith rather than prejudice. In one recently completed declaration, the Rev. Dr. Alan Crawford, a former moderator of the Synod of Victoria, in collaboration with others, states that many church members find themselves “in unresolved conflict with the Assembly’s declared permission (in Resolution 84) to permit ordination of practising homosexual persons living in ‘right relationships’... ”.

He begins by affirming “Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church and acknowledging the faith and unity of the holy catholic and apostolic church.” Citing Jesus’ words “that from the beginning God has ordered creation so that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh (Mark 10:6-9, Genesis 2.24)” Dr. Crawford rejects “the unsubstantiated claim made in the name of diversity that other understandings of sexuality can be accepted alongside that of the apostolic testimony in the Scriptures and followed by the Church Catholic over the past 20 centuries.”

Confessional documents are unlikely to end the fruitless controversy of the past decade. But they signal an attempt to confront the church’s officials with the possibility or likelihood of schism by those “who believe in the unity of the church as a matter of faith.”

Church unity is one of three themes explored in Dr. Crawford’s claim that the ‘false teaching’ espoused by the Uniting Church “has not originated in the living Word by which the Church’s faith and obedience are nourished and regulated” but that it derives from “the developing secular culture” of the Western world’s permissive attitude to sexual behaviour and “the reductionist Christology of the past 30 years.”

“The attempt to depart from the faith of the Church has such serious implications for the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed, and the unity of the Uniting Church and the church catholic”, that it calls for an act of confessing by all Uniting Church members, “so that we may bear a more adequate witness to the catholic faith, life and ethics.”

On sexuality, Dr. Crawford says that Jesus invokes neither the law nor right relationships based on love when challenged about the grounds of divorce. Jesus sets sexuality at a more basic level, citing the creation story. Similarly, Paul uses the body doctrine and sets it in the redemptive language of the Trinity. “Since we have been bought with a price our body is meant for the Lord; it is the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.” Dr. Crawford says that “with matching clarity and consistency the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis 19:1-29, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) and the apostolic witness (Romans 1: 26-28, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10) reject all other forms of sexual activity.”

On forgiveness of sins, he affirms that “the will and purpose of God for human life and its negation through sin is central for the understanding of faith,

the proclamation of the gospel and ‘the new order of righteousness and love’ (*para 3, Basis of Union*). Thus “we confess our belief in the God of infinite compassion and love for all people. Since all have fallen short, God ... calls all to repentance, receiving the gift of forgiveness through faith, bestowing on us the Holy Spirit and calling us to obedience. We accept our obligation to love all people regardless of sexual orientation, welcoming them to worship and providing them with pastoral care.”

Moreover, “the naming of those sins which stand in the way of being made whole in Christ is not for condemnation but for salvation (John 3:16-17). We reject the attempts to delete (as sins) any form of homo- or bi-sexual practice; we find no basis in the apostolic testimony for their deletion in the name of ‘justice’ or ‘compassion.’”

The statement views with compassion “persons who feel driven by strong sexual passions which conflict with God’s will for human life. We also honour with great respect women and men who on the basis of faith accept a life of celibacy, not entering sexual relationships of whatever orientation.”

The possibility of schism is raised in the section on **the unity of the church**. Dr. Crawford recalls that the *Basis of Union* commits the Uniting Church to “enter into unity with the Church throughout the ages by her confession of the historic creeds ... (receiving them) as authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith.” (Para. 9) That commitment, he says, “depends on the Uniting Church confessing the Catholic Faith in a manner which our sister churches recognise as authentic and ... consistent with its meaning. We have not seen any statement that Resolution 84 furthers our ecumenical calling or our relations with other religions. All the evidence points in the opposite direction.”

All Uniting members therefore should “heed the warnings from our sister churches which will impact on the progress towards unity. Further ... as members of the Uniting Church our prior loyalty is to the Faith of the Church Catholic and the Apostolic Witness. It will be a matter of great sorrow if the movement towards revision results in schism within the Uniting Church, or even the departure of several thousand more members on the grounds of conscience.”

The statement notes other serious implications of the Resolution 84. “The UCA is one of the teachers in the community as well as in the Church. We must not teach a false understanding of God’s new creation shaped in part by contemporary Western cultural views on sexuality. Ordination is the public act whereby the UCA ‘acts and speaks within the one holy catholic and apostolic church’ and requires of the ordinand her/his confession of its faith and ... ‘a holy and disciplined life.’ We find the ordination of a person in a same gender sexual relationship irreconcilable with the faith and order of the Church Catholic as affirmed by many of our ecumenical partners in dialogue.”

He concludes : “(Resolution 84) will end in schism. As the distinguished Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg declares, ‘For a church that would permit itself to be pressured to no longer understand homosexual activity as a deviation from the biblical norm and to recognise homosexual partnerships alongside marriage, such a church would no longer be based on the foundation of Scripture, but rather in opposition to its unanimous witness.’”

Dr. Crawford is retired in Victoria. His confessional statement includes notes and guidelines. Some of these will appear in next issue of ReForming.

GUIDELINES FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

An evangelical approach to understanding the Bible

Concluding a paper given at the RA Conference in July 2004 by Brian V. Hill.

In regard to guidelines I make no claims to originality. Athanasius, the 16th Century Reformers, and many others have beaten me to it. All I can do is to summarise what I perceive to be the best advice of evangelical Christians through the ages.

1. **Clarity.** We should expect that the key truths of Scripture will be clear, not buried in verses we find obscure. As a young person I was bemused by preachers whom some of my evangelical friends held in awe because of their ability to derive profoundly spiritual lessons from remarkably obscure passages. Keen to avoid the over-familiar, they fished for their texts in scriptural eddies instead of the mainstream. Alternatively, some preachers developed intricate typologies which made us lose track of the narratives they were derived from.

Such contortions were not what brought to faith those people I mentioned earlier: people who were converted simply by reading the narrative as it stands. The 16th century Reformers spoke of the “perspicuity” or clarity of the central message of Scripture.

2. **Canonicity.** At the same time, that message is not couched in timeless abstractions but emerges from a story or stories. Methods of biblical analysis such as source, form and redaction criticism have often proved helpful, but tend to obscure this fact, whereas the current interest in narrative criticism has rediscovered it.

Of course, any scholarly tool can be two-edged. So even narrative criticism can mislead us if we focus on the mythical power of story instead of the truth-claims embedded in the biblical story. One of the gains from narrative criticism is a new appreciation of canonicity, that is, of the fact that out of the many

writings emerging from biblical times certain books were selected, and placed in a particular order, to reflect the progression of revelation and to engage human attention through a variety of literary forms.

Part of the miracle behind this process is the fact that a unified story emerges from the diversity of forms – what a scholar of a previous generation called ‘the unfolding drama of redemption.’ Any passage we study must be read against the backdrop of this grand narrative, which supplies the meanings we sometimes woodenly term ‘the Christian world-view.’

This obliges us to compare Scripture with Scripture. In particular, we need to weigh up the Old Testament in the light of the more complete revelation in the New, as Jesus himself often did. But we nevertheless need both the Old and the New, for the earlier revelation is like the shading in a picture which throws into sharper relief the areas of light, and the light of the world is Jesus Christ, the desire of the ages. In the end, our meeting must be, not just with a text, but with the Word become flesh.

3. Christ-centred. The third guideline requires us to interpret the Scriptures in a Christ-centred way. Some Reformed scholars have said that the Gospels are descriptive but the Epistles are prescriptive. Contrary to this view, we must insist that the person and work of Jesus Christ are the appropriate cornerstone of our hermeneutic.

This means that not only do we interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New, but even the rest of the New Testament in the light of the Christ-event. Paul and James, for example, are not at loggerheads, as some liberal scholars have maintained, but reflect different facets of the diamond that is the Christophany. If I am sounding too academic, then let us at least be guided by the question we suggest our children ask themselves: “What would Jesus do?”

4. Contextual. The fourth guideline, which I touched on earlier, is to read passages in their literary and historical contexts. Incidentally, we should not underrate the number of contextual clues we find in the Bible itself. It is one of the merits of story that it so often fills in the context for us, fleshing out the cultural environment in which certain truths and rulings stated at that time were originally set forth. That equips us to engage in what John Stott has called ‘cultural transposition.’

For this we often need help, particularly where different scriptural strands seem to be emphasising different things, as in the examples I gave earlier. This is where reverent biblical scholarship can be a great help, so long as it is not used to fragment the text or cast doubt on its face value. As I said earlier, this enables us, among other things, to assess whether a particular passage should be regarded as conveying an enduring truth or a culturally localised one.

5. Corporate. The fifth guideline is to test our own interpretation by trying it out on fellow-believers. To the would-be gurus in the church at Corinth who were competing for supporters, Paul said: “If you have a lesson or a revelation to share ... let the others weigh what is said.”

The faint possibility exists, of course, that you may indeed be another Luther, who sees the need to stand alone in opposition to the church establishment because you perceive that it has seriously undermined the Scriptures. More likely, and more biblically, a large number of believers in ekklesia may come to this conclusion, as has happened in the case of the Reforming Alliance.

But such action is valid, if and only if, we have prayed and discussed together our interpretation of the Word, and have pledged ourselves to continue to be open to future correction by that Word. Conscience obliges us to declare what we believe the Word of God is saying to our drifting denomination. But there is no room for the smugness and judgmentalism that characterises some evangelical groups, let alone the demonisation of Christians who think differently from us.

6. Readiness. My final two guidelines are more to do with attitude than meaning. We must come to the Bible ‘ready and willing’ to live by what we learn. As to readiness, I was greatly helped when young by what was called ‘the Scripture Union method’, a four-step piece of advice which we still use in that movement. It began: “Pray before you read.” In general, most atheists, because they approach the Bible with skepticism, fail to be convicted, although some have been unexpectedly surprised. But often what is missing from the approach even of regular Bible readers is expectancy. “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.”

7. Willingness. Be ready – and willing. To be true evangelicals, we must be willing to obey what God’s Spirit says to us through our reading. It is too easy to think we have fulfilled all righteousness by ‘rightly explaining the word of truth.’ The Apostle James spoke scathingly of those who are ‘hearers of the word and not doers.’ One of today’s most recurrent scandals is the number of self-styled ‘apostles’ and TV evangelists who drift into blatantly immoral behaviour.

Postscript

One thing these seven guidelines have in common is the conviction that they interpret the Bible in the way the Bible itself requires. I do not have the space to demonstrate this further here, but a useful exercise would be to take each guideline and ask: Is this how Jesus used the Scriptures? Taken together, these guidelines distinguish us from traditions which grant to church hierarchies, human reason, or personal intuition the right to amend or override what the Scriptures clearly reveal.

Conclusion

I put it to you, then, that what I have been describing is the core evangelical approach to the Bible. By it, we must not only evaluate other approaches, but also those evangelical viewpoints themselves which appear to us to misuse the Scriptures. It's a task that will never be done once for all. Conditions change, new light on many issues does dawn from time to time, but the person of Christ, known to us through Spirit and Word, straddles cultures and cultural change, constantly drawing us back to the core truths of his Gospel. May God preserve us from ever letting either personal lapses or cultural corruptions dull our senses when we read the Scriptures which have been entrusted to us.

I acknowledge helpful critical comments of an earlier draft of this paper from Rev Dr Max Champion, Rev Dr Kevin Giles, and Alison Hill.

Dr. Brian V. Hill is Emeritus Professor of Education, Murdoch University, W.A.

Reaffirming the central doctrines of the church

Continuing Doug Jones' paper on the Gospel, Church and Sexuality, presented at the RA conference in July 2004.

How does a church in the Protestant tradition do its theological and doctrinal work, when it lacks confessional statements, and openly acknowledges, indeed endorses, diversity of understandings of Scripture (in spite of, or, perhaps, because of, what the Basis of Union says about scripture), and encourages diverse interpretive approaches?

Given that the 2000 Assembly of the UCA officially acknowledged a range of diversities (e.g. in relation to how people understand and interpret scripture), how are theology and doctrine worked out through the Assembly? I suggest that it does not do it all that well at the moment. Let me give two examples from 1991 to the present:

- 1. Ordination.** In 1991, in deciding about the renewed diaconate, the Assembly committed the church to a new theological understanding of ordination. It adopted the notion of one ordination and two commissionings. In 1994, with the assistance of the Commission on Doctrine, the Assembly changed that decision to two ordinations.
- 2. Church structures.** Changes to church structures were approved by the 1997 Assembly. That decision, as we all know, allowed the establishment of a single Church Council. That in itself may have been a sound decision. However, it left elders dangling in theological space because there seemed to be no awareness that it substantially changed the theologi-

cal basis of eldership. Before 1997 eldership was about corporate oversight of a congregation by the Elders' Council. Individuals were chosen and commissioned as elders and became part of that corporate episcopate. Eldership was both a corporate responsibility and an individual responsibility.

After 1997, eldership was about individuals called elders who were in some way part of the Church Council which now had the responsibility of corporate oversight. The nuances of the changes seem to have escaped the Assembly, so that the 2000 Assembly was confronted with the theological loose ends that it had created. The Assembly appeared to me to be sadly lacking in critical theological acumen on this issue. The question of what it means for the UCA to be "guided by its Basis of Union" remains rather problematic in relation to this issue.

If the Assembly was unable to get it right on what I consider to be reasonably straightforward issues, it faced an uphill battle when it set itself to address the question of homosexuality and ordination. Such has proved to be the case. What are some of the indicators that the UCA has a problem in doing good theology and developing clear doctrinal positions on this matter? I suggest that, in choosing to use a Task Group rather than the Assembly Commission on Doctrine, the Assembly clearly signalled where its commitment to sound theology and doctrine lay. An Assembly Commission clearly committed to rigorous theological work in the Reformed and Evangelical tradition was marginalized. I will say no more on this matter.

The UCA faces a major challenge. On the one hand it encourages theology, but on the other hand, theology within the confessional orthodoxy of the traditions that came into the Uniting Church is in danger of being marginalized. The Assembly Commission on Doctrine made its last major contribution to the Assembly in 1994 when it helped the Assembly to get out of the hole it had dug for itself in 1991 with one ordination, two commissionings. Its subsequent demise and the establishment of the Working Group on Doctrine have left theologians in the church asking just how serious the Assembly is about its theological and doctrinal enterprise.

This is not to imply that the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine has not made contributions on certain matters referred to it. It does, however, raise the question of why certain matters are referred by the Assembly to task groups when they are primarily about theology and doctrine.

Christiaan Mostert, in a 1997 article wrote: "It is ...striking that when the 6th Assembly wanted to commission a report on the church's response to changing patterns of human relationships and sexual activity, it appointed a sexuality task group. It did not see this as primarily a doctrinal matter. It wanted to ensure broad and open discussion, and asked the Standing Committee 'to appoint the members of the task group, ensuring that it is constituted by a

broad range of views and expertise – theological, ethical, biblical, medical and sociological’. One can agree that the breadth of expertise is essential for the investigation of a set of issues as complex as sexuality, but in the event there was not one recognized theologian in the membership of the task group! Finally, when the Assembly Standing Committee recently received a close-to-final draft of the revised report on sexuality, to be discussed at the eighth Assembly (Perth, July 1997), it discussed a recommendation that a task group be established to report on the matter of the authority of the Bible. All well and good; but when the suggestion was made that this might instead be referred to the Commission on Doctrine, it was like a lead balloon. One might reasonably have thought that this is precisely the kind of task that should be given to a Doctrine Commission.”

- from *“Is the Uniting Church Serious about Doctrine”* (Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia 1977-97, edited by William W. Emilsen and Susan Emilsen, UTC: 1997, 269).

By-passing the Doctrine Commission is not necessarily the same thing as relegating doctrine to a marginal position, though they may go hand in hand. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the Commission on Doctrine has a very low status in the Uniting Church.

The next question that needs to be asked is whether the Assembly has the capacity, with its current structures and processes, to determine doctrine. It appears to me that the current process for dealing with theological and doctrinal matters through a triennial Assembly is somewhat inadequate. If the Assembly is the council with responsibility for determining doctrine, is there a better way to go about the task of doing sound theological work and doctrinal development that will serve the ministry and mission of the church? (c.f. The Roman Catholic Church’s commitment at the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965 indicates the seriousness of the theological and doctrinal enterprise in that tradition. Papers were presented and represented in draft after draft until there was general agreement on the substance contained in each document. The approach of that church is to test any theological novelty against the tradition and also to test it against their commitment to a natural law approach to theological ethics. When the final votes were taken on substantive matters in that council, the votes were in the order of 2000 members ‘for’ and 10 ‘against’.)

Perhaps consideration needs to be given to dedicating every fourth Assembly to engagement with theological and doctrinal issues, with a doubling of the time that the Assembly meets for these ‘doctrinal’ assemblies. Careful consideration needs to be given to finding a better way for the Assembly to do its theological and doctrinal work, noting, of course, that theological and doctrinal matters do not emerge in the life of the church in a carefully scheduled way.

Notwithstanding my earlier comment about substantial majorities in Vatican II, the truth does not necessarily lie with the majority. There have been times in the history of the church when various forms of heterodoxy or heresy have held sway over extended periods, only to be later refuted and subsequently rejected as the Holy Spirit has guided the church more fully into the truth that is in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, conflicting voices within the tradition were often heard. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples is in the book of Jeremiah. That book portrays Jeremiah, a minority voice, in conflict with other ‘prophetic’ voices. With hindsight, the covenant community came to accept that the ‘word’ that Jeremiah proclaimed was truly from the LORD.

Formative factors in theology

Where does authority lie and what weight is to be given to the various components of the theological enterprise? It seems that human experience has been given a pre-eminent place in recent discussions and debates about sexuality, and the contemporary culture is also an extremely strong influence. Have we moved through the history of the church from Catholicism to Protestantism to the UCA, in which the formula ‘church, scripture, experience’ is to be dominated by undue emphasis on experience?

NEXT : Doug Jones’ continues: How culture impacts on the church, and leads to issues like Resolution 84.

Admin. staff come and go

The thanks of members, congregations and the national executive of the Reforming Alliance go to Mrs. Lyn Marshall, who has concluded her work as the Alliance’s national administrator. She has been the public face of RA since its formation, and has handled her many duties with efficiency, courtesy, patience and sympathy. The apostle Paul lists administration as one of the ministries of Christians, and Lyn has blessed us all by the generosity of her service, and her prayerful concern for the integrity of the Uniting Church. All involved in RA ask Lyn to receive our warmest thanks and continuing good wishes.

The new administrator is Peter Bentley, who comes to the position with vast experience in the Uniting Church, including secretary of Sydney presbytery and the author of the ‘Bentley Report’ of 1997 on church-wide responses to the Sexuality Task Group report. Mr. Bentley is an experienced social researcher, writer, public speaker and administrator with a heart to see a vibrant and healthy church.

The National Office is now located on the Newtown Mission property. All contact details remain the same.

A proposal on Sexuality

for consideration by the Eleventh Assembly, 2006

The Reforming Alliance commends the following resolution to congregations in the hope that they will discuss it and forward it to their presbytery, and/or Synod for consideration. The more proposals that come to the Assembly, the more chance there is that the matter will have to be considered.

The following course of action is recommended to all congregations concerned at the passing of Resolution 84 by the 10th Assembly in 2003.

That the proposal outlined below be brought simultaneously by as many presbyteries as possible to the Eleventh Assembly. A single proposal is preferred to a host of similar resolutions, which would be lost in the committee process. It will be more effective if all concerned parties bring the same resolution.

That in each presbytery as many congregations as possible bring this same proposal to their presbytery for debate.

Rather than one congregation or one member of presbytery bringing the proposal (with accompanying timidity) it is hoped that as many congregations as are willing bring the same proposal. With the same form of words coming from multiple congregations, presbyteries will be obliged to deal formally with it by giving appropriate time to debate it, and if necessary by adopting formal procedures for voting on it.

The Proposal

The resolution has been designed to bring a biblical statement to the 11th Assembly concerning the God-given sexual nature of humanity. If this resolution is passed by the Assembly it will qualify the meaning of Resolution 84, which, because of its indirect language, would then be governed by the biblical statement.

That the Assembly reaffirm the sexual teaching and practice of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, as attested in Scripture, by

adopting the following confessional statement:

We believe that God created us as male and female to live in freedom and unity with each other by being faithful to our male or female gender. (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-24)

We believe that sexual intercourse should be expressed solely within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, which God ordained and which is confirmed by Christ and honoured by its unique likeness to Christ's relationship to the Church. (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:4-7; Mk.10:6-8; Eph. 5:25-33)

We believe that people who engage in homosexual practice are acting contrary to the clear witness of Scripture to our creation by God as male and female (Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13(a); Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-20; 1 Tim.1:8-11)

We believe that people who engage in homosexual practice harm the eucharistic fellowship of the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 5-6)

We believe that the Church's solidarity with the world in sin (Rom 3:23) and gratitude for the reconciliation of the world in Christ (2 Cor 5:16-21) commits her:

- To speak Christ's word of mercy and friendship to any person who is tempted by homosexual practice (John 8:1-11), and to offer them counseling and pastoral care when they experience temptation, hostility, illness or bereavement (Galatians 6:1-6)
- To invite people practising homosexuality to experience Christ's freedom by abandoning behaviour which is contrary to the clear witness of Scripture (Galatians 5:16-25)

We believe that the Church should not normalise homosexual practices within the Church by:

- Ordaining, commissioning or inducting into the ministries of the Church those practising homosexuality.
- Solemnising or blessing homosexual unions.

Action is needed now on the RA motion for Assembly 2006. Congregations and RA members are urged to encourage presbyteries to send the motion to Assembly for discussion at the national level.

National Conference at Lincoln College, Adelaide

REGISTRATION FORM

Name: Christian _____ Surname _____

Address _____ Postcode _____

Phone _____ email _____

Special Dietary or other needs: _____

Conference Only: Wednesday: \$35 (please tick)

Thursday: \$25

OR

Conference and Accommodation:

Tues–Thurs. \$150

Wed–Thurs \$ 90

Extra night \$60

(Mon or Thurs, inc. dinner and breakfast)

Total Cost: \$ _____ (All prices are inclusive of GST.)

Payment by cheque made out to The Reforming Alliance.

NOTE: RA is underwriting the cost of the conference, donations will be gratefully received

Credit Card: M/card Visa Number

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Cardholder's Name _____

Expiry Date ____ / ____

Signed _____

Accommodation is in single rooms with shared facilities, linen provided.

Please send completed forms and /or cheques to:

The Registrar, Reforming Alliance Conference

C/o Rev Mark Grimm,

28 Antares Way. Athelstone SA 5076

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Reforming Alliance Congregations:

There is a special role for the member congregations of the Reforming Alliance. We ask that your congregation send at least one delegate to the 2005 National Conference in Adelaide. Your delegate will be advised about proposals and voting procedures before the conference. Without your involvement, R84 may remain unchallenged in the life of our denomination.

Rev Dr Phil Marshall Newtown Mission

ph: (02) 9519 9000 www.newtownmission.org.au