

Notice of Motion

That the Presbytery, in making a decision about its relation to the Perth College of Divinity (PCD) for theological education in WA, note the explicit and implied misinformation in the anonymous document **New Directions in Theological Education Background Information Paper**, and decline to be advised by it.

Rationale

This document reads as a partisan attempt to persuade, rather than as an objective attempt to inform. Repeated attempts have been made to correct some of the errors in this paper, but written and spoken dissemination of these errors persists. This misinformation misleads the Presbytery and may compromise its ability to make a truly informed decision about its relation to the Perth College of Divinity.

The misinformation and misrepresentation in this document is in breach of the Code of Ethics **3.2 (c)**:

Processes and decisions of councils of the Church should be reported accurately and fairly. Disagreements needs to be conducted within the framework of principles provided by A Manual for Meetings, (ie. in a way that expresses Christian community and commitment to rational debate based on evidence and argument, not personal attacks and mere assertion of opinion).

and **3.3 (d)** Ministers have a responsibility to ... accurately represent opposing views.

Explicit or Implied Misinformation

Opening Paragraphs

1. The assumption in the first line that the Presbytery, “... is moving ...”, and in the last paragraph, “As we move on ...”, without the Presbytery’s ever having been given the opportunity to decide to make a move, inappropriately presents the matter as a *fait accompli* and implies the Presbytery has no decision to make.
2. “One of the key motivating forces which brought us into union ...” was actually ecumenism. To withdraw from the PCD would be to break-up an extremely successful ecumenical partnership, originally with Anglicans, Baptists, and Catholics, more recently with Anglicans.
3. The implication that “high quality theological education to equip both lay and ordained for missional leadership” cannot be provided for the future without withdrawing from the PCD is false. There is nothing in membership of the PCD that prevents this provision, and much that encourages it. The placement of a theological faculty on a University campus creates a rare interface, with many students of other courses having chosen to include some theology in their tertiary education down the years. It exposes candidates to the many different religious and secular points-of-view that exist. Theological education with PCD has always been flexible and responsive to new opportunities and can continue to be. The new chaplaincy programme is particularly important for contemporary ministry and mission, and there are moves to run a Graduate certificate in clinical pastoral

- care in partnership with Royal Perth Hospital (at its request) designed for nurses, doctors, etc. To withdraw from the PCD (and, therefore, from Murdoch University campus) is to withdraw from an extraordinary mission opportunity.
4. It is presumptuous to assert what, apart from the Holy Spirit, will “grow the church” in a very complex secular environment that does not only affect the UCA. The use of “manage its ‘decline’.” to describe faithfulness is derogatory.
 5. Scripture does not call us to “... grow the church ...” but to be faithful, in season and out of season. There are always national and international influences upon church demographics that are quite beyond our control.
 6. **Focus on Lay Education** Withdrawal from PCD is not required to vary or increase the education and equipping of lay people. VET courses may be offered as variously as teachers, opportunities and technologies allow. Many UCA lay people have already long been active in the ways described here. Many lay people have undertaken very significant theological education at Murdoch down the years, including at degree level.
 7. **Skilling of ordained ministers for mission in our current context** Because partnership in PCD enables us to share a wider range of differently expert teachers, much that is commended here has long been offered through PCD in the theology programmes at Murdoch, including missiology, apologetics, and world religions. The spirituality of Australian Aboriginal culture has long been taught at Murdoch University through the Kulbari Aboriginal Centre. Murdoch’s School of Business offers many units in the kinds of leadership and organization mentioned here. Withdrawal from PCD is not required for ever-broader continuing education. Ministers can continue to acquire new skills, as they do now. In the first place, however, ordinands need a thorough theological education and formation of the whole person in scripture and gospel. The critical matters of content, formation and discernment require the development of focused analysis and reflection upon text and practice, before ordinands are equipped to discern what skills it may then be appropriate to develop and use.
 8. **Re-shaping of our ordinand course to meet new National Standards** There is nothing in the National Standards that requires withdrawal from PCD. Other theological colleges in Australia are not closing down their tertiary programs in light of the new National Standards. It remains the case that most candidates present with a previous degree. There is great benefit to them and the church in furthering their academic development. National Standards’ advocacy of “multiple pathways” encourages our maintaining a truly tertiary pathway, along with the development of “other pathways” for “those without undergraduate degrees”. Working with the PCD, we have already ordained 3-4 Aboriginal candidates (often in collaboration with Nungalinya) and 1 Korean candidate. Removing all tertiary theological education to “Interstate collaboration”, however, will be expensive in a range of ways and result in draining candidates away from future ministry in WA. Duplication is not a bad thing, but a good thing. It increases each state’s benefit from resident theological teachers and students, and local exposure

to their gifts for the common good. The New Assembly National Standards do not contradict our ecumenical heritage by requiring all theological teachers to be members of the Uniting Church. The gifts brought by members of other denominations through the PCD have greatly enriched theological education in the UCA in the West. To set up a more tribal, in-house structure would contradict and diminish much of what this paper says it aspires to.

9. **Letting go of the past** Scripture does not counsel us simply to let go of the past. Scripture constantly exhorts us to remember and value the past, and to let it contribute to our formation in the present, as we look to the future. Withdrawing the UCA from the Perth College of Divinity has deep and wide theological, educational, ecumenical, ministerial, missional, pastoral, legal, and administrative implications. It will take the collective wisdom of the whole floor of Presbytery to begin to give these matters adequate consideration. PCD members who offered to resource the Presbytery Standing Committee, before it took a decision that was beyond its powers, were denied opportunity to do so and many misunderstandings remain. Contrary to what is asserted here, the PCD is not “a joint Anglican/UCA body to oversee the theological programme ...”. The PCD’s work is not oversight. The PCD’s work is cooperation and negotiation. All members of PCD are equal partners. PCD was formed because Murdoch University, understandably, could not sensibly negotiate with individual denominations. PCD negotiates with Murdoch University on behalf of the churches’ cooperative theological education programmes.
10. **The Journey** Clearly, some people have been working toward terminating the UCA’s relation with the PCD for some years, without Presbytery authorization to take matters as far as they have. Contrary to the assertion here, there have been no “long and considered deliberations by a number of Councils of the church”. The councils of the church are Assembly, Synod and Presbytery. The “General Council” (which appears to be a joint Synod-Presbytery Standing Committee), CEDAL and the Presbytery Standing Committee are not Councils of the Church in the regulations. At the May 2016 Presbytery, time was given for two members to address the floor, unchallenged, about theological education. Some debatable assertions and questionable aspirations were articulated, but no opportunity to clarify or challenge them was given. A significant number of our tertiary theological educators, our “scholarly interpreters”, past and present, took the trouble to attend, but the meeting’s structure gave them no opportunity to speak or even to answer questions. Time was given to table discussions, notes from which were collected. We have never been advised what the collation of those notes revealed. In any event, their content has no value for our regulated decision-making. On this one occasion when the matter might have been put before a Council of the Church, there was no motion on PCD or related matters before the house, no debate or discussion and no decision-making. From when the Revd Dr Alex Jensen tendered his resignation in October 2015, the UCA has not fulfilled the obligations of partnership in the PCD by replacing him, and

declined to be clear about why not and whether it ever would. Some have sought to blame Murdoch for this indecisive lack of commitment by the UCA, asserting that the university put a freeze on new jobs. It was true that new jobs had to be better justified, but in this period the university itself put on new staff and the Anglicans appointed a new New Testament lecturer, for PCD. In June 2017, the PCD did seek clarification and certainty. However, the use of the word “demanding” for PCD’s correspondence is derogatory and false. It has the effect of making something entirely reasonable, when seen in context, sound unreasonable and it creates a false impression of pressure. PCD’s letters were, in fact, courteous and respectful, and indicated a desire to keep working cooperatively with us as partners in the provision of theological education.

11. **What is the future of Perth Theological Hall?** It is imagined that, in future, the education of candidates for the ministry will not be Theological Hall’s primary concern. Those who have taken theological degrees by correspondence, and/or tried to sustain cooperative endeavours inter-state will know the real costs, inadequacies and difficulties of this. It could supplement the work done with and through PCD, but not replace it. The assumption that “new staff will be recruited” is vague, but other indicators show that replacing the existing staff, currently reduced to two, is meant. Given that the recent performance reviews of our current theological educators were excellent, what would be the grounds of their dismissal? World-class work was acknowledged and commended. No concerns about work performance were raised. If the UCA withdraws from the PCD, new staff will certainly be more expensive, as 40% of the cost of each current staff member is paid for through Murdoch University because of our PCD partnership. With this comes the free provision of staff offices, the availability of the Murdoch University Worship Centre and the housing and staffing of a theological library. Withdrawal from the PCD will mean that 100% of these costs will have to be borne by the UCA alone.
12. **An Informed faith** The *Basis of Union’s* valuing an “informed faith” and “scholarly interpreters of Scripture” is quoted at the end of a document that describes, and is part of, a determined effort to diminish the availability of truly tertiary theological education in WA. It is equally disturbing that, when the misinformation is cleared away, no reasonable motivation is discernible. We see that the motivation to remove the UCA from the PCD is not being transparently described, explained or justified. This ought to be of the greatest concern to Presbytery. It does not allow for the development of mutual understanding and trust, for the meeting of minds in a genuine unity. Much of the “stress” and “strained relationship” referred to in this document have not been due to proposed change, but to a lack of openness about motivation, intent and process in relation to that proposed change, and exclusion from a proper process.

Moved: Margaret Tyrer

Seconded: Lesley deGrussa