

PROPOSAL 7

NOTICE OF MOTION

Proposal

That the Presbytery confirm the Perth Theological Hall's membership of the Perth College of Divinity at Murdoch University for the provision of theological education in WA.

Rationale

The Theological Hall's membership of the PCD, since 1985, has enabled the UCA in WA to provide amongst the most cost-effective, most flexible, graduate and under-graduate theological education in the UCA, for its lay people and ordinands alike. Nowhere else has such significant cost-sharing, with a secular university and with other Christian denominations, been so successful. For example, our Anglican partner currently provides the New Testament lecturer, while we provide an Old Testament lecturer. That halves the cost of teaching biblical studies for us. Through this partnership, we have been able to offer a very wide range of courses, including those currently thought desirable for mission in the Australian context.

From the beginning, PCD courses have been varied according to the expertise of lecturers, old and new, and current needs. From the beginning, PCD has provided undergraduate and graduate opportunities for lay people, while its staff on Perth Theological Hall has undertaken the more complex tasks of contributing to the formation of candidates for the ordained ministry. From the beginning, local UCA congregations and local UCA ministers have been deeply involved in this. From the beginning, the Theological Hall's work, with PCD on campus, in metropolitan congregations, on the road for rural congregations, or available via various information technologies, has been in the service of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. It has not allowed itself to be the partisan instrument of any particular theological faction or fashion, though sometimes accused by each end of the theological spectrum over the decades of being at the other end.

While theological teachers in PCD can, and do, cater for various educational levels and cultural backgrounds, Australian society at large continues to value higher and higher levels of tertiary education for all professional people, especially for those working in fields of great complexity. The Australian context, with its ancient spirituality and its recently migrated denominations and religions, requires spiritual leaders of faith and sophistication. A truly tertiary level of theological education must be one of the options the Church continues to provide. More, not less, reflection on Scripture and gospel for our whole formation is required, if we are to become more thoughtful and consistent in word and deed, and commend ourselves to the Australian context.

Our membership of PCD creates a rare interface for mission. It exposes secular students to the possibility of studying theology and it exposes candidates for the ministry to the various religious and secular point-of-view those engaged in mission must be exposed to. The recent interest in PCD's work expressed by Royal Perth Hospital is only possible because PCD is ecumenical and is situated on a secular campus. To withdraw from PCD would be to withdraw from extraordinary possibility for mission.

Our membership of PCD provides for our properly meeting the Assembly's requirements in theological education. There is nothing in the new National Standards that will be easier to fulfil by withdrawing from the PCD or that requires withdrawal from PCD.

Especially since WA's distance from the east is so great, it is not in the interests of the Uniting Church in WA to have to send any of its candidates east. We would lose the enrichment of their contribution here, of participating more fully in their formation ourselves, and possibly lose their future ministries from WA altogether.

The complexity of establishing PCD within a secular university and with other denominations was enormous, and the value gained from it has been enormous. Established as PCD now is, the demands upon our skills and finances in keeping it effective will be less than the demands of trying to construct something different on our own, even if that new structure will not provide tertiary level education.

Understandably, Murdoch University will not deal with individual denominations. If we withdraw from the PCD, the opportunities, not to mention the facilities, on that campus will be lost to the UCA. We will certainly lose:

- The 40% Murdoch University contribution to all our lecturers' salaries
- 100% of the cost of providing lecturers in other Assembly-required areas currently supplied by other denominations and used by us, such as New Testament and Church History
- Murdoch's provision of the offices and computers for our lecturers
- Murdoch's provision of an office for administration in the worship centre
- Murdoch's housing, computer cataloguing, acquisitions and staffing for a significant theological library
- Murdoch's provision of a worship centre, lecture theatres and conference rooms as required

and much else that is incalculable besides.

Moved: Rev Margaret Tyrer

Seconded: Lesley deGrussa