



President: Deidre Palmer

General Secretary: Colleen Geyer

26:CG:JB

18 July 2018

Dear Ministers of the Uniting Church

Last week in Melbourne the Fifteenth Assembly considered the issue of marriage and same-gender relationships.

The Assembly resolved to honour the diversity of Christian belief among our members by holding two equal and distinct statements of belief on marriage. (See attached to this letter the unconfirmed minute from the Fifteenth Assembly regarding the resolution that was made.)

This decision will allow Ministers and Pastors who are marriage celebrants authorised by the Uniting Church the freedom to conduct or to refuse to conduct same-gender marriages.

The existing statement of belief that “marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life” has been retained.

A new additional statement of belief has also been adopted.

That statement reads “marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of two people to live together for life.”

What this means is that ministers who, in good conscience, are willing to conduct same-gender marriages are able to do so. This does not compromise the rights of those ministers who, in good conscience, cannot conduct same-gender marriages.

They will continue to be able to hold their belief that marriage may only be between a man and a woman, and can continue to use a marriage liturgy that reflects that conviction.

Church councils will have the right to determine whether marriage services take place on their premises.

In order to resource ministers and congregations, the Assembly will be developing a resource setting out what each part of the resolution will mean practically. This resource will be written in plain English. We are hoping that this will be available in the week beginning 6 August 2018.

There will also be an email address that Uniting Church members can use to receive answers to their questions. The email address is marriage-questions@nat.uca.org.au.

You will notice that in the resolution, the Assembly Officers will arrange for the preparation of an additional authorised marriage liturgy which reflects the understanding of marriage as outlined in the marriage statement contained in (c)(ii) of the resolution for approval by the Assembly Standing Committee at its August 2018 meeting, for use according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The preparation of an additional authorised marriage liturgy, in accordance with requirements as set out in the Marriage Act will be done prior to the Assembly Standing Committee meeting.

The Assembly Standing Committee meets 24-26 August 2018. It is envisaged that following approval and any amendments from that meeting the additional authorised marriage liturgy will be available no later than 21 September, with marriages of same-gender couples being able to be conducted from Saturday 29 September 2018.

As authorised Uniting Church marriage celebrants, you will be able to complete Notices of Intended Marriage in keeping with this timeline.

If there is any further information that you need to receive, I will contact you through your Synod General Secretary immediately.

I ask that we hold each other, and all members of the Uniting Church, in prayer in this time of transition.

Grace and Peace

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colleen Geyer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Colleen Geyer
Assembly General Secretary

UNCONFIRMED MINUTE

Resolution of the Fifteenth Assembly

Marriage and same-gender relationships

The Assembly resolved:

(a) To acknowledge:

- (i) that within the Uniting Church there is a diversity of religious beliefs and ethical understandings, developed through continuing faithful discernment and held with integrity on matters relating to sexuality and marriage; and
- (ii) that marriage is a gift God has given to humankind for the well-being of the whole human family.

(b) To determine that the Church is able to accept this diversity within its life and make the decisions necessary to enable its ministry and members to act with integrity in accordance with their beliefs.

(c) To vary its policy on marriage by recognising two statements of belief:

(i) the belief expressed in the 1997 statement on marriage as follows:

“Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life. It is intended to be the faithful lifelong union of a woman and a man expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage, the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service:

- The woman and man make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
 - The couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
 - The Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.
- Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together. In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security thus providing a firm foundation for society”.

(ii) the belief expressed in the following statement on marriage:

“Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of two people to live together for life. It is intended to be the faithful lifelong union of two people expressed in every part of their life together. In marriage, the two people seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service:

- The two people make a public covenant with each other and with God, in the company of family and friends;
- The couple affirm their trust in each other and in God;
- The Church affirms the sanctity of marriage and nurtures those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage and calls upon all people to support, uphold and nurture those who pledge themselves to each other in marriage.

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together. In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security thus providing a firm foundation for society”.

- (d) To affirm that Ministers and celebrants authorised by the Uniting Church in Australia may exercise freedom to decide whether the minister’s or celebrant’s religious beliefs allow the minister or celebrant to accept requests to celebrate marriages, as authorised under the Marriage Act and according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- (e) To request the Assembly Officers to arrange for the preparation of an additional authorised marriage liturgy which reflects the understanding of marriage as outlined in the marriage statement contained in (c)(ii) above for approval by the Standing Committee at its August 2018 meeting, for use according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- (f) To note that Church Councils:
 - (i) have the authority under Regulation 4.4.1 to permit or refuse the use of any property held for the use of the Congregation for the celebration of marriages, as authorised under the Marriage Act and according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia.
 - (ii) do not have the authority to require a Minister in placement in their Congregation or to prevent a Minister in their Congregation from celebrating marriages as authorised under the Marriage Act and according to the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- (g) To request the Standing Committee, taking account of advice from the Assembly Legal Reference Committee, to consider and take such action as it considers appropriate, including (if necessary) the making of additional Regulations, to enable Church Councils acting under Regulation 4.4.1 to make decisions regarding use of property for celebrating marriages, in conformity with one of the statements of belief mentioned in (c)(i) and (ii).

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