

# Uniting-Lutheran Dialogue in Australia

## DECLARATION OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION

by The Uniting Church in Australia  
and The Lutheran Church of Australia

9 November, 1999

In gratitude for God's gracious Covenant with us in Jesus Christ, the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia freely agree to enter into a relationship of mutual recognition, as outlined in the following statement:

### 1. Our Unity in Christ

In Christ, God has reconciled us to himself. In baptism we are one body through the cross of Christ. Together we participate already now in the unity of the Spirit. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, we desire to grow into and maintain this unity which is ours in Christ, in the bond of peace.

### 2. Historical Background

Our roots are mainly in the German, Scandinavian, French, Swiss, Scottish and English churches, which were renewed by the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

We come from different parts of the world, diverse ethnic backgrounds, and with distinctive experiences of being Christian. We thank God for bringing our two communities to live together in this land, along with other Christian traditions. We thank God that we have been privileged to share our faith with the Aboriginal peoples of this land, and in turn to be enriched by their expression of that faith.

Although our forbears treasured close links with each other during the Reformation and for many years afterwards, we regret that our ignorance and misunderstanding of each other have kept us apart. We now seek to restore and develop our relationship.

The Uniting Church in Australia identifies itself in the Basis of Union (1971, 1992). The Uniting Church claims continuity with the "Reformed" and the evangelical traditions, and is committed to continue to learn from the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658), and also from the preaching of John Wesley (1703-91) in his Forty-Four Sermons (paragraph 10, Basis of Union).

The Lutheran Church of Australia identifies itself by adherence to the Confessions in the Book of Concord (1580) because they contain the truth of Scripture.

Both traditions have understood themselves, despite their shortcomings, as standing in the continuity of the faith and ministry of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. They have therefore sought, by these statements of belief and by the maintenance of ministerial continuity, to gather Christians together into a single fellowship.

We have been in official dialogue since 1979, and have produced the following agreed statements:

- Reports to our churches on *The Word of God, Justification by Faith* (1981); and *Law and Gospel* (1982).
- Statements received officially by the two churches as "stages on the road to altar and pulpit"

fellowship": Baptism (1984), The Eucharist (1985), The Ministry (1986), The Church (1988), One Christ in Church and World (1990).

- A Pastoral Statement on Marriage (1987) of which the two churches were asked to take note.
- A Doxological Affirmation (1997) which has not yet been submitted to the churches.

Some practical co-operation is already in place, from consultation at the level of Heads of Churches to special arrangements for local eucharistic hospitality.

### **3. Our Shared Christian Heritage**

We identify the following ways in which we believe and practise a shared faith:

#### ***3.1 The gospel of grace***

We proclaim that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, and that we are saved by this grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. 'You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor 6: 11). This is not our own doing; it is the gift of God. We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (See *The Word of God, Justification by Faith and Law and Gospel.*)

#### ***3.2 The Bible***

We submit ourselves to the Word of God, accepting the authority of the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the prophetic and apostolic testimony to Jesus Christ. (See *The Word of God, Justification by Faith.*)

#### ***3.3 The Creeds***

We profess the ecumenical creed of Nicaea and the Apostles' Creed. We believe that Jesus is true God and true human being, and confess one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### ***3.4 The Church***

We believe that the Church is created and preserved by the triune God, through God's saving action in word and sacraments, to be in the world as sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God. We recognise that the Church stands in constant need of reform and renewal. (See *The Church.*)

#### ***3.5 Mission and Ministry***

We believe that all members of the Church are called to participate in its apostolic mission. For this they are given various gifts of service by the Holy Spirit. Within the community of the Church the ordained ministry<sup>3</sup> exists to serve the ministry and mission of the whole people of God. We hold the ordained ministry of word and sacrament to be a gift of God to his Church, and so an office of divine institution. (See *The Ministry.*)

#### ***3.6 Baptism***

We believe that through baptism with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit God unites those baptised with Christ in his death and resurrection, incorporates them into his body, the Church, and confers the gracious gift of new life in the Spirit. Through the grace of God these and all other benefits of the work of Christ are received by faith. (See *Baptism.*)

#### ***3.7 The Eucharist***

We believe that the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Thus the bread and wine we eat and drink in the Lord's Supper are a

participation in the body and blood of Christ. We believe that we receive the grace of divine forgiveness and new life offered in the sacrament and respond with the thankful offering of ourselves for God's service. (See *The Eucharist*.)

### ***3.8 Public Worship***

God graciously serves us in word and sacrament when we gather in Christ's name. We celebrate and proclaim our salvation in Christ, and we are built up together into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. We use similar orders of service for the eucharist, for baptism and confirmation, for confession and absolution, for marriage and funeral rites. We share a common heritage of hymns, canticles and collects. (See *A Doxological Affirmation*.)

### ***3.9 Marriage***

We believe that marriage is instituted by God and is intended as a relationship of mutual companionship in which husband and wife complement and serve each other. We hold that the strength and stability of marriage and family life is the expression of God's purpose for the well-being of the wider society. It is the God-given institution for the expression of sexual intimacy. (See *Pastoral Statement on Marriage*.)

### ***3.10 The Consummation***

We share a common hope in the final consummation of the kingdom of God, when God's purpose will be fulfilled, all things will be united in Christ, and we shall see him as he is, and we shall be like him. Meanwhile we are sure that as he is righteous, so we are to be righteous in this world.

## **4. Affirmation**

We affirm in each other's churches the presence of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We believe that, despite our shortcomings, we stand in the continuity of apostolic faith and ministry. We acknowledge and respect each other's ordained ministries as real and effective expressions of the proclamation of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and pastoral oversight. We have learnt much from each other. We pledge to work together to develop joint participation in mission and witness, and to continue to seek ways of manifesting the unity that is ours in Christ.

## **5. Co-operation**

We encourage local co-operation between our two churches in the ministry of the word and pastoral care, and a shared deployment of human and material resources for witness in local communities by word and deed. This co-operation should take place on the following basis:

- a) *Joint public profession*, by participating congregations, of the catholic faith as contained in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.
- b) *An undertaking to respect* the distinctive traditions enshrined in the Book of Concord and the Basis of Union.
- c) *Arrangements for shared Ministry*, whereby, in certain specific circumstances (eg, in country areas where frequent and regular pastoral care and eucharistic ministry is impossible) a minister of either church is given pastoral responsibility for members of the other church.
- d) *Agreements on eucharistic hospitality*, by which each church, in circumstances like those described in [c] will officially invite and welcome members of the other church to share in Holy Communion according to pastoral need.

e) *Joint recognition of particular projects*, and the joint commissioning of the minister(s) involved by the Uniting Church presbytery and the Lutheran president.

#### **6. Future Growing Together in God's Mission**

We undertake to continue to work together towards the following goals:

- *Intentional Sharing* in pastoral ministry and in mission.
- *A Concordat for Full Communion*: full eucharistic sharing, with interchange-ability of members and ordained ministers at every level.

Together we make our prayer that, "being rooted and grounded in love, we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God". (Eph 3:17-19)