



**WORKING  
TOGETHER**

*Nationally*

**1991**

**Working Together Nationally** is an annual publication raising issues and providing reports and articles from Assembly agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia for synods and parishes

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### WORKING TOGETHER NATIONALLY

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# From the President

Participants in the Sixth Assembly of the Uniting Church will have reported to presbyteries before this booklet reaches your hands. And a member of the Assembly staff will report to your synod.

But what did the Assembly appear to be, from the president's chair?

First, it was participatory.

The worship, small group meetings and debates involved many people. Young people, members of small synods and presbyteries, members of ethnic congregations and Aboriginal members all played a major part.

This also helped to make the Assembly enjoyable. There seemed to be very few who were frustrated or disappointed by the Assembly.

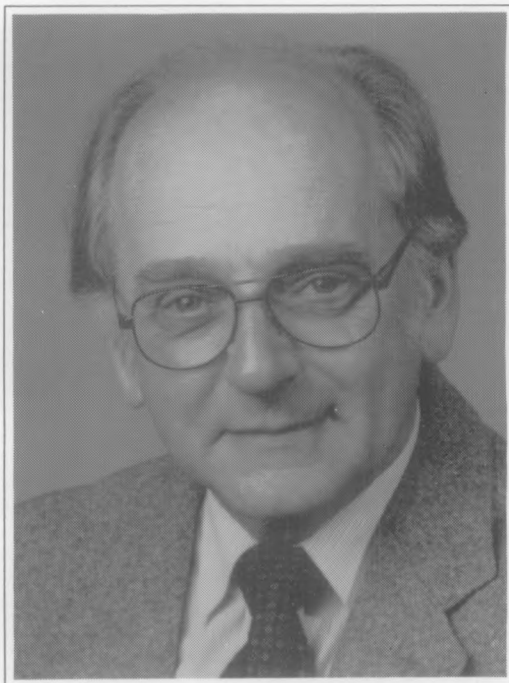
Second, the Assembly reflected the multicultural nature of the Uniting Church.

Languages other than English were used far more often than in previous Assemblies. The music and prayers were drawn from many cultures. And the issue of introducing a variety of church procedures and regulations for the benefit of ethnic congregations, received a good airing.

Third, the Assembly was forward-looking.

Both in the theme *'Forward Together'* and the large report on Ministry, there was a major effort to find new and better ways of evangelism and ministry. Much of the detail is yet to appear, but the atmosphere of debate was optimistic and enthusiastic.

The influence of the World Council of Churches' Assembly was evident — in worship and theological discussion. And the greetings given to the Uniting Church



Assembly by guests from overseas and guests from other Australian churches were most impressive.

Specific decisions of the Assembly, on the diaconate, community ministers, ecumenical relations, the Beneficiary Fund, sexuality and a host of other issues, will be found in this **Working Together Nationally**.

I urge, synod members to use this resource in their parishes, so that communication in the church can be improved. If we are to succeed as a body governed by "inter-related councils", it is vital that communication be clear, frequent and accurate. All of us can play a part in that process.

I greet you in the name of the Assembly and wish you God's blessing in your own sphere of ministry.

D'Arcy Wood

## SPECIAL EDITION

This year **Working Together Nationally** is a special edition. It differs from previous years in that reports from the national agencies have not been published. These are available as part of the material produced for the Sixth Assembly. In their place we have covered some major events which have and will affect the life of the Uniting Church, nationally.

The material has been collated and edited from the combined efforts of various communications staff from the Assembly and synods. They include: Andrew Demack, Lee Duncan (Qland); Damian Gleeson, Barry Gordon (NSW); Michael Ellemor, Ric Holland, Joni Tooth, Brian Walsh (Vic); David Busch (Tas); Coral Kentish (WA); Nick Kerr (SA); Rex Hunt and Marjorie Lewis-Jones (Assembly).

# If you would like more information...

Each year many of the Assembly agencies produce discussion papers, publicity material and other items of information which are distributed throughout sections of the church.

Even so, there are many people who are interested in the issues and information but who never seem to get hold of those papers.

If you would like to be put on the mailing list of any of the Assembly agencies to receive material as it is produced, or receive copies of material produced in 1991 (see over) please complete the form below and return it to:

**Assembly Communications Unit**  
PO Box E266  
St James NSW 2000

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- Please keep me in touch.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please  which agency you would like to be kept in touch with)

- Liturgy
- World Mission
- Stewardship Australia
- Social Responsibility & Justice
- Joint Board of Christian Education
- Ecumenical Affairs
- Frontier Services
- Commission for Mission
- Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress
- Women & Men
- National Mission & Evangelism
- Communications

# List of Publications during 1991

## Frontier Services

- |                          |                                |           |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Frontier News (4 times a year) | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Kid's Pack                     | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card                 | ea \$0.30 |

## World Mission

- |                          |   |           |
|--------------------------|---|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | World Mission Partners (3 times a year) | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Programs and Projects                   | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Annual leaflet                          | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card                          | ea \$0.35 |

## UAICC

- |                          |               |      |
|--------------------------|---------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Message Stick | Free |
|--------------------------|---------------|------|

## National Mission & Evangelism

- |                          |  |        |
|--------------------------|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Prayer letter  | Free   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MITAL - Newsletter on ministry in<br>Tourism and Leisure   | Free   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "Forward Together" (various resources)                     | Free   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Report of the National Consultation<br>on Ethnic Diversity | \$2.00 |

## Secretariat/ASC

- |                          |                                      |        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "The water that unites"              | \$2.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Working Together Nationally (annual) | Free   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Report on Ministry in the UCA        | \$5.00 |

## Ecumenical Affairs

- |                          |             |      |
|--------------------------|-------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Newsletters | Free |
|--------------------------|-------------|------|

## Liturgy

- |                          |                                |        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Springboards (3 issues a year) | \$3.00 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|

## Stewardship Australia

- |                          |                     |      |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Planned Giving News | Free |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------|

## JBCE

- |                          |                           |      |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Catalogue of publications | Free |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------|

## CFM

- |                          |  |           |
|--------------------------|--|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mission Prayer Handbook 1992 -<br>'Becoming Peacemakers' | \$3.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Missionprobe - 'Homeless Youth'                          | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Responding to Youth Homelessness -<br>a report           | \$2.50    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card   | ea \$0.35 |

## Communications

- |                          |   |      |
|--------------------------|---|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | A vision of communication (Canada)              | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tell me a story...<br>(Narrative communication) | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The Manila Declaration (WACC)                   | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christian principles of communication<br>(WACC) | Free |

## Women & Men

- |                          |                                    |      |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pamphlet - Sexism: What men can do | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pamphlet - Towards wholeness       | Free |

Sub-total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

+ 10% for postage/package \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \$ \_\_\_\_\_





Rev Gregor Henderson  
General Secretary

# Big events, far-reaching decisions

This year has been a stimulating year in the life of the Uniting Church - a year of big events and far reaching decisions.

## NCYC

In January, 3,100 young people, most of them from Uniting Church parishes, gathered in Toowoomba for the National Christian Youth Convention. It was a time of great encouragement, for the Christian commitment and enthusiasm of these young people makes me very confident about the church's future in Australia.

The challenge of the gospel was well presented in bible studies, pavilion programs, worship and preaching, and the response was positive. Many made or confirmed decisions for Christ at NCYC. It's now up to the church to accept the gifts of these committed young Christians and allow them to be part of the church of today as well as of tomorrow.

## 7th Assembly - WCC

In February, 4,000 Christians, about 700 of them from Uniting Church parishes, came from every corner of the world to the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra.

It was an astonishing event - inspiring and bewildering, mindstretching and disappointing, all at the same time.

Here was the church universal in all its diversity of cultures and tongues, and theological and

liturgical emphasis. Here was uplifting worship, with not a doubt that the Holy Spirit was moving among us. Here were elegant theological statements about Christian unity, the integrity of creation and the needs of the world.

But here also were atrocious business procedures, entrenched vested interests and selfish jockeying for position.

I believe the Canberra Assembly will prove to be a watershed in the life and work of the WCC, for many churches and confessional families are committed to a reordering of WCC priorities and procedures. Over the next years the WCC is likely to focus more clearly on the central issues of faith, unity and mission.

## 6th Assembly - UCA

Then in July, 400 Christians, nearly all from Uniting Church parishes, came from all over Australia and many parts of Asia and the Pacific to join in Brisbane in our Sixth Assembly.

The opening service in Festival Hall will long be remembered for its expression of the multicultural life of the Uniting Church - five languages were used in the service, with our newly installed president, D'Arcy Wood, even preaching part of his sermon in Tongan.

'*Forward Together*' was launched as a co-ordinated nationwide vision for Christian mission and evangelism within Australia.

During the week of heavy business sessions, the Assembly was much enriched by the messages from 22 ecumenical guests - from partner churches in India, Taiwan, Korea, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga; from the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia and from churches in Aotearoa New Zealand; from the Australian Council of Churches and five of the Australian churches with whom we are in national dialogue.

Dr CS Song, from Taiwan, the 1991 Cato lecturer, also led the Assembly in daily bible study.

There's no doubt the Sixth Assembly was one of the most ecumenical Uniting Church events ever.

## Decisions

Assembly members clearly wished to be decisive. A decision to renew the diaconate was taken by a near-unanimous vote after years of uncertainty. Youth workers, lay pastors and lay preachers have all been recognised as "specified ministries" of the Uniting Church.

Two major investigations have been initiated - on sexuality and on the use of resources across the sectors of the church.

A firm 'no' was said to the proposal for bishops in



the Uniting Church.

Our solidarity with Aboriginal people was expressed in resolutions on land rights, on alcohol and on the covenanting process.

For the first time representatives of two other faiths addressed an Assembly. Jewish and Islamic leaders spoke both affirmingly and challengingly about the Uniting Church's efforts to relate constructively with their communities in Australia.

A statement on sexual violence was adopted.

Many of these decisions are aimed at better equipping the Uniting Church to be a missionary church within Australia - more active than ever before in local mission and evangelism.

### Thanks

Although these big events have punctuated the

year with great celebrations and important decisions, let me close this brief article with thanks to two groups of people who go on week-by-week and month-by-month in faithful discipleship, not always sufficiently recognised in the wider life of the church.

First, I pay tribute to the staff of the Assembly, not many in number but a hardworking bunch of efficient and dedicated people.

Second, I salute the consistent solid service of local worship and ministry, where the Uniting Church's 350,000 members and 2,400 ministers continue to give vital witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Over the next 12 months may we build on all this service and indeed move *'Forward Together'* in sole loyalty to Christ, the living head of the church.



## NCYC: Breaking new ground

It took two years to organise, 700 people to make it happen, drew together 3,100 young people (300 from overseas) and made a major impact on the delegates who joined in the community living, small group studies, electives, worship and evening rallies that was NCYC '91.

The convention theme, "Breaking new ground" become a reality as delegates were challenged by one another, by leaders and the key speaker, Tony Campolo.

The convention was held in January 1991, at the Toowoomba Showgrounds, Queensland. Communities of delegates were accommodated in several local boarding schools with some delegates choosing to live on-site.

Organisers believed community life was a critical part of the convention. Feedback from delegates indicated it was highly valued as a means of getting to know one another and sharing fully in fellowship and worship.



The Expo style concept of pavilion presentation was one of the major breakthroughs of NCYC 91. There was plenty of positive feedback from delegates on the pavilions visited.

Eight pavilions were set up at the Showgrounds offering a wide range of choice. The major part of the daytime program revolved around these pavilions - each with its own particular focus.

The pavilions featured a range of learning mediums: speakers, video, slides, dance, drama, music, workshops, panel/forum. The morning pavilion program featured Bible study input with opportunity for discussion and reflection.

All pavilions used the same bible passage on a given day. The afternoon program involved a wide range of activities. Each pavilion also hosted nightlife in the form of coffee shops, concerts, worship and dances.

**The Aboriginal** pavilion was planned in consultation with Aboriginal communities in Toowoomba and other areas.

Aim of the pavilion was to enable delegates to be more aware of the many different issues facing Aboriginal people from all over Australia. Aboriginal people shared their stories, giving delegates a greater understanding of Australia's history and indigenous culture.

**Blow the Mindset** was the pavilion focussing on the life of the church. Its aim was to challenge stereotypes and ideas about the church and to help bring about new ideas and visions of young peoples' place in the church. Gregor Henderson led the presentation and discussion which was in the format of a "Donohue talk-back" show.

**The Creative Arts** pavilion took a close look at the performing arts including dance, mime, storytelling, song writing, recording and musicals.

Trisha Watts (vocalist) and Dennis Clare (mime artist) led workshops on creativity in worship. Their input was highly appreciated by delegates.

Next was the **Global Village** pavilion. Its aim was to give delegates a better understanding of

Christianity world-wide and to generate discussion on world issues affecting the church. Overseas delegates were given the opportunity to share some of their faith experiences. The main speaker was Albert Burua from Papua New Guinea.



**The Jungle** (Youth Ministry) pavilion looked at the many aspects of youth ministry in the churches and on the streets. Fuzz Kitto and Ken Anderson led discussions on topics ranging from humour to homelessness and youth suicide. The activities were practically based and involved delegates doing things and examining their own responses to various issues.

**Lifesavers** was the name and theme of the mission and evangelism pavilion. It sought to provide information, methods and resources to use in

specific mission situations.

Through electives, dramas, walk-through displays, game shows and the speakers, Bill Hollingsworth, Carolyn Kitto and Alan Robinson, delegates were given a range of ideas on how to evangelise.

**The Lighthouse** pavilion focused on prayer and worship with main speakers, Ray Thompson, Trisha Watts, and Monica O'Brien. Delegates looked at the basics of prayer and worship - why do we pray/worship? - and at the many different forms of prayer and worship.

**The Shed** was the home of the social justice electives. Each day ten electives were offered on issues such as human rights, the environment, homelessness, violence. Ngconde Balfour's elective, 'An Inside view of South Africa', was highly rated as were Christine Gapes' pavilion addresses.

Also presented was a drama dealing with sexism, racism and attitudes towards physically and mentally disabled people. The Shed was also the venue for Compassion's Third World village in which delegates took part in a simulation exercise to help them realise the deep seated problems of poverty.

Each morning delegates broke into small groups for bible study and discussion on sub-themes arising out of the main theme "Breaking new ground".





The daily themes were "Clearing the land", "Planting seeds", "Growing strength", "Springing forth", "Bearing fruit" and "Fully mature".

The evening rally was called Founders Experience and featured musical and drama entertainment by guest artist, Steve Grace and local artists.

American sociologist, evangelist and author, Dr Tony Campolo, gave a series of challenging addresses on putting the gospel into action and making a difference where God has planted us. He challenged many to deeper commitments - to live as Christ has advocated - to be peacemakers and to make a stand for justice.

He told a group of youth workers: "If we lose this generation of young people it will be because we made Christianity too easy... we lost sight of the biblical Jesus.

"Young people are looking for a passionate, active faith in Jesus. If you want young people in the Uniting Church, you'd better start calling them to a crusade and condemn a cultural Jesus who calls people to cheap grace."

Campolo said the Uniting Church with its commitment to evangelism and social justice could become one of the most dynamic forces in Christendom... "the Uniting Church with all its broad spectrum of people have those who are infilled by the power of the Holy Spirit and also have those who are very alive to the forms that social justice must take if the Kingdom of God is to be realised.

"In this church and at conventions like this, these people are forced to talk to each other and in the synods and in the presbyteries they are forced to interact with each other and that's why I think there is great hope, because each can learn from the other what is desperately needed in order to create a wholistic approach to social change."

Towards the end of the convention Campolo stressed the importance of small group support back home. He was quite definite - anyone who thought they were going to maintain enthusiasm on their own, would wake up a month later and find it gone. It was essential to use the experience as a base for continued faith.

Convention co-ordinator and Queensland director of Youth & Childrens Ministry Unit, Murray Fysh, said one of the outcomes of NCYC was the number of young people seeking service opportunities. Work camps organised by synod youth ministry units are being well-attended, and mission services such as the Order of St Stephen received many inquiries from interested from youth.

A youth worker at the convention said young people had been encouraged to share their personal experience of God with their friends and he was beginning to see the fruit of the challenge to Christian maturity in his local parish situation.

He said young people were both inspiring and trying out the church, but they must pursue their vision with patience.



"Young people sometimes move from one church to another if they haven't the freedom to celebrate their faith the way they feel led. They want to push structures to the limit," he said.

Fuzz Kitto (NSW) said NCYC's had always been a life-changing event and "are important in forging a sub-culture in which young Christians are taught a wholistic faith they can live out from day to day.

"I think this convention has helped young people realise how important being involved and supported in a community is, in overcoming the spirit of hopelessness predominant in our society."

Gregor Henderson, Assembly General Secretary, said he had been very encouraged by the commitment shown by the young people to the church, their sense of excitement and how seriously they had approached the scriptures and thinking about the Australian ministry situation.

"Commitment to discipleship and solidarity with those who are suffering are important factors in the growth of our church," he said.

He pointed out the task at hand was harnessing the commitment and energy evidenced at the convention so the church could be enlivened and renewed.



## ABOUT FACE 3

Over the past decade the ABOUT FACE projects have made a significant contribution to the lives of several hundred young people, as well as to the life of the Uniting Church around Australia.

ABOUT FACE 3 will take place in Queensland in December/January and provide a faith and cultural exchange through the meeting of Aboriginal and other Australian Christians.

Up to 250 young Australian Christians will spend 21 days in Queensland in December 1991 — January 1992. They will have 10 days in Townsville working with Aboriginal leaders from the Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and spend time at Yalgabimbi, the Centre for Aboriginal Community.

Time will be spent in worship, bible study, learning from Aboriginal leaders and working at Yalgabimbi on a specific work project.

In groups of approximately eight, they will then spend seven days living with urban Aboriginal people throughout Queensland and northern New South Wales, before rendezvousing in Brisbane for a four day briefing and covenanting time.

Representatives from migrant and ethnic congregations have been invited to be part of the experience, which will also include Aboriginal young people.

The event is designed to provide a rich intercultural experience of Christian community, which will involve sharing, worship, work, learning, discovery, recreation and fun, as new understandings of faith and culture are experienced and learned. It is hoped that out of this experience these young people will be better equipped to be agents of change in their homes, local churches and in the wider community.



# Diversity, dogma, discussion... a heavenly foretaste?

If not immediately recognisable by their WCC standard-issue denim or calico tote bags, garb and skintone would often quickly give them away.

In Canberra's sweltering February heat, pallid Europeans sizzled beside Sri Lankans in saris. Stately Africans mingled with Aussies in tanktops and Orthodox religious clad fully in black.

4,000 in all, these were the people taking part in the World Council of Churches 7th Assembly - the largest and most diverse religious meeting ever to take place in Australia.

About 850 of these people were voting delegates from most of the WCC's 317 member churches and representing most Christian traditions in nearly every nation of the world. There were also 10 guests from other faiths and 200 observers from non-member bodies.

For two weeks these people met each morning in a tent on the sports oval at the ANU for worship. They then dispersed across the campus in small groups to study the bible and have section discussions on issues of militarism, racism, human rights, women's issues and the plight of

indigenous people. In the afternoons it was off to the National Convention Centre for plenary sessions and press conferences.

WCC Assemblies meet every seven or eight years and are the highest governing body of the WCC.

This assembly took as its theme *Come Holy Spirit Renew the Whole Creation*.

One keynote speaker on the theme, Dr Chung Hyun Kyung, gave a dramatic presentation which sparked controversy with the Orthodox and some north European protestants. Issues raised included the relationship between theology and culture, what is pagan and what is holy, and how emerging Third World theologies relate to traditional forms.

## The gulf war

The gulf war figured prominently in debate, as well as in peace prayers, an all night peace vigil, the opening sermon by Archbishop Sir Paul Reeves from New Zealand, and a street procession.

On its final day, the Assembly called for an immediate ceasefire and subsequent immediate,



complete and unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. It also urged the United Nations to reassert its role as peacemaker, convene a Security Council meeting on the Iraq-Kuwait dispute, and an international conference on peace, security and cooperation in the Middle East.

Archbishop Keshisian of Lebanon during one plenary session said: "The Gulf war is not a just war; it's just a war."

## Aboriginal people

Aboriginal issues gained prominence early in the piece as WCC delegations visited two Aboriginal communities in Queensland and NSW prior to the Assembly.

They reported that racism in Australia "is not just horrific but genocidal".

A special multi-media plenary on Aboriginal history and concerns was favourably received by assembly participants. The Assembly later endorsed a WCC commitment to support and monitor a 'treaty process' between Aborigines and the Australian government, and called on the church in Australia to 'return land unjustly taken' from the Aboriginal people. It also asked WCC members to support struggles for indigenous people everywhere for self-determination, land rights and religious freedom.

## China received back

After three decades of estrangement the China Christian Council was received back into WCC membership - a move which was warmly cheered.

North Korea sent observers for the first time. And from South Africa, the mixed-race Dutch Reformed Mission Church was admitted into membership and observers from the white Dutch Reformed Church attended for the first time in more than 25 years.

Eastern European delegates spoke of new tensions in the wake of the collapse of communism.

Along with appeals on Sri Lanka and El Salvador, proposed statements on internal conflicts within sovereign states, South Africa, the Pacific, the Baltic States and regions of tension in the USSR received general endorsement but were referred to the WCC Central Committee for final action.

## Youth and women

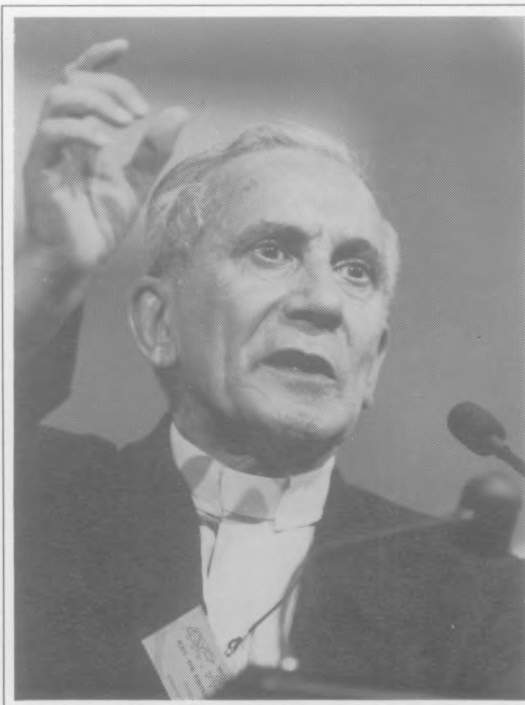
Concern for the low number of delegates aged below 27 (11%), led the Assembly to decide that one of the WCC presidents should be under 30.

"Ecumenical suicide" was the cry of protest from youth as only 11 youth were elected to the 150-member WCC Central Committee.

A pre-assembly youth forum, with 300 participants from 90 countries, said that despite their feelings of helplessness and powerlessness the forum encouraged and strengthened them to move into the future and build links of global and ecumenical solidarity.

Taking as its theme "For such a time as this" the three day pre-assembly women's meeting - attended by some 300 women and a few invited men - also spoke of solidarity.

Its statement says "the total church has not adequately claimed the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women... or responded to the challenge it poses to be in solidarity with women".



For Aruna Gnanadason, the new director of the WCC's subunit on Women the task is urgent.

"We ask the churches to take our hands in our struggle," she said.

## Sub-themes

The Assembly received reports from sections which addressed issues arising from each of the four sub-themes.

\* *'Giver of Life - Sustain Your Creation'* called for an emphasis on the theology of creation; a new and global ethic of economy and ecology; and a church covenant to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

\* *'Spirit of Truth - Set Us Free'* raised concerns about human rights; community among people of different races and ideologies; mass media; international peace; justice for women; and sustainable value systems (including international economic structures).

\* *'Spirit of Unity - Reconcile Your People'* pointed to the missional and inclusive nature of the church. It drew attention to the need for a community of sharing; for reconciliation among cultures and people of different faiths and ideologies; and for



closer relationship between the ecumenical and pentecostal-charismatic movements.

\* *'Holy Spirit - Transform and Sanctify Us'* addressed personal and corporate spirituality and affirmed the importance of worship; spiritual disciplines; work for unity and justice; inclusiveness; service of the world and Christian lifestyles of non-violence and holiness.

### Church unity

Questions of theological diversity and progress towards church unity came under scrutiny during the Assembly's second week.

During a program for assembly visitors, 'Gathered around a divided table', four speakers looked at prospects for eucharistic unity.

In a message to the Assembly, Pope John Paul said the ecumenical task is urgent because the witness of the church "is less convincing to the degree that the world continues to be confronted by our divisions".

Despite convergence in recent years it was clear, both in Assembly discussions and in worship, that the eucharist, ordained ministry and views about the nature of the church, remain key stumbling blocks to full communion.

The Assembly asked the Vatican-WCC Joint

Working Group to concentrate on remaining obstacles to a fuller relationship between the two bodies.

### Other highlights

Other assembly highlights included the worship - which reflected the diversity of languages, cultures and traditions at the Assembly, an opening address by Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, messages from children and 'differently-abled' people, and an open air welcome to Australia presentation called 'Gathering Under the Southern Cross'.

### A foretaste of heaven

The WCC meeting was a "foretaste of heaven" according to the UCA's Rev Ronald Reeson from Canberra who chaired the WCC Assembly executive committee with oversight for local arrangements.

Summing up what was undoubtedly the experience for many who went to the WCC, he said "a huge number of accredited visitors present here are from the UCA and we've all been given a fantastic feeling of what the worldwide church is about.

"Worshipping and being involved with people from all around the globe has been an invaluable experience."

## Worship: a cause for celebration

"Having experienced the worship in the worship tent at the WCC Assembly," said Jean Gledhill of Epping (NSW) "many of us will go home asking why this kind of worship does not happen in our own congregations.

"It's not a matter of copying what's gone on here. But somehow each congregation needs to struggle to make its worship more inclusive, to acknowledge our vulnerability and to celebrate our joy together as a community".

Jean's comments say much about the kind of excitement generated by the dynamic and diverse worship experienced at the Assembly.

Singing in a variety of languages, the use of liturgical dance and banners, along with the participation of people from a good spread of regions - all served to make the worship memorable and meaningful.

The specially devised Lima liturgy, which allows people from various traditions to feel comfortable about concelebrating the eucharist, was also a highlight.

Then there were the seven *animateurs* from

Sweden, Brazil, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Africa, Ghana, and the USA. Not only did they write much of the music used at the Assembly, but they were the people who kept the 80-voice, cross-denominational choir and other participants on target with their singing and in moving their bodies.

### Acknowledging traditions

"One of the main developments within ecumenical circles is what's happened within worship," said amateur, Per Harling, of the Church of Sweden. It used to be at WCC Assemblies that specific denominations each took responsibility for planning a service and invited other assembly participants to come.

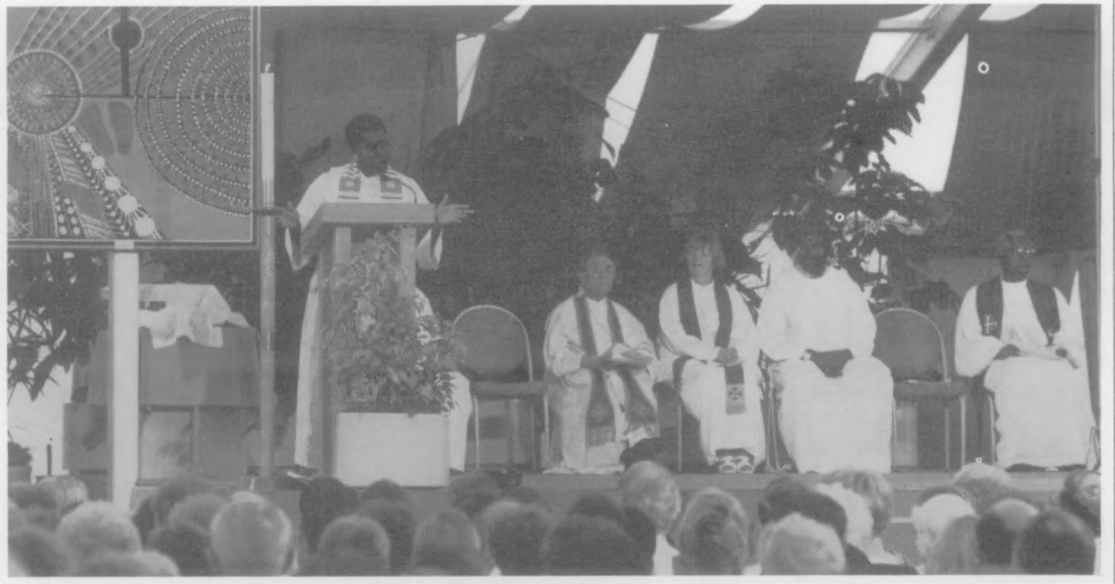
Now, he said, "We are making use of each others' traditions in the renewal of liturgical life.

"What has really struck me in this music from different cultural traditions," Mr Harling continued "is this is maybe the only moment of any kind that English-speaking persons are forced to get a hint of different cultures by struggling with the words".

Moreover, he observed, the diversity of assembly music is helping Australian church members to







learn experientially how multicultural their country is.

### Creative expressions

For many, the worship at the WCC Assembly was also enhanced by the creative expressions of faith decorating meeting places and given as gifts to participants.

Examples of this are John Coburn's striking mural picturing the sun, a cup and the bread, and the wall hanging made of patches from congregations all across Australia - which brought colour and beauty to the convention centre.

There were also leather gumleaf bookmarks and candles made by the people of Canberra and

given to every delegate.

Likewise, Aboriginal artworks on display at the High Court gave many an insight into Aboriginal spirituality.

"These things were not just an expression of Australian culture," according to National Mission and Evangelism's John Mavor, "but also an expression of Australian faith and love".

"I think they were brilliant," he said.

*Cassettes and videos of the Assembly's music highlights are available for \$15.00 from the Joint Board of Christian Education. (See back cover for address).*



## Aboriginal issues centre stage

From the start it was clear the WCC Assembly would give Aboriginal issues a high profile.

The official opening saw an Aboriginal ceremony of welcome which involved walking through the smoke of cleansing fire and the sending of a 'message stick' by WCC General Secretary Emilio Castro - symbolising a request for permission to enter the land.

Some days later a dynamic and comprehensive account of Aboriginal history and survival ended on a note of reconciliation as non-Aboriginal Australians poured on to the stage to demonstrate their desire to work for 'a just Australia'.

The Rev Gregor Henderson, General Secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia, came to the front of the plenary hall at the close of the session, while the last strains of a song by Aboriginal band Yothu Yindi echoed. "Aboriginal sisters and brothers," he said, "will you allow us non-Aboriginal Australians to join you in the journey to

bring about a new, just Australia - please?"

His request was met with applause, both from the Aboriginal people taking part in the presentation and from the audience. Many people came forward to join the scores of indigenous people from many countries already on stage.

The 90-minute multi-media plenary, 'Land Rights and Identity' was prepared by the Aboriginal and Islander Commission of the Australian Council of Churches.

A range of speakers explained Aboriginal history from Dreamtime through the 'invasion' of the British colonisers in 1788, and their 200 years of struggle for identity and self determination in the face of this.

Anglican Bishop, Arthur Malcolm, shared his own background as a mission-raised Aborigine.

Despite the church's negative influences on



Aboriginal people and culture generally, he said, "I believe the church saved my own people from dying out.

"The Aboriginal people were chosen by God to be the caretakers of the land... to officially and legally be given back title to our land would heal us", Malcolm said. "We have to break the ice and extend the hand of fellowship to each other. Many of us lack the courage to do so, but let us try".

### UCA public apology to Aboriginal people

The liturgy on the Assembly's first Sunday began with a public apology by the UCA to Aborigines for the church's many failures to stand with them.

The Rev Dorothy McMahon gave an account of a painful incident that had happened the night before.

A procession from the convention centre to the worship tent for an all night vigil was supposed to be led by a group of children, explained Dorothy. However, a group of Aboriginal people thought they were to lead it.

"I went to the Aboriginal people and asked them to

come behind the children," she said.

"I used a voice that I didn't recognise in myself - a voice which Aboriginal people and, I guess black people and indigenous people around the world have come to associate with white people who tell them what to do and who push them aside.

"Because they are Aboriginal people they didn't fight me. They moved aside. They wept. And we lost them at that moment.

"I spent several hours with them later when I realised what I had done. And they forgave me".

Sir Ron Wilson told the congregation that he stood there, as national president of the UCA, with Dorothy "because her confession is our confession.

"On behalf of the Uniting Church I tender our Aboriginal sisters and brothers our humble apology," he said.

### UCA's Djiniyini for WCC committee

The first indigenous Australian to be elected to the WCC Central Committee is the UCA's Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra.

President of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and former moderator of the Northern Synod, Djiniyini said he regarded his election as a privilege.

His appointment was also seen as an opportunity to strengthen contact between Australian Aborigines and indigenous peoples world-wide.

"My role will be as a bridge builder between the Aboriginal church and the non-Aboriginal church in Australia," he said, "helping us to come together and to understand each other's struggle and the struggle of the whole Australian society".

### Others have their say

Kathleen Maltzahn, WCC youth delegate from East Kew (Vic.) said she'd like to see indigenous issues examined more fully as a result of the Assembly.

"Aboriginal issues have been highlighted at the WCC and highlighted to our shame.

"I want us to respond to this as a church," she said, noting that it was the practical things like land and property that really needed further examination and action.

The Rev Gregor Henderson is confident the WCC Assembly will inspire a more concerted effort by all Australian churches to "act together" on Aboriginal issues.

Likewise, UCA president D'Arcy Wood said Australian people still had "a great deal of painstaking hard yakka" to do in addressing the many complex historical problems of the Aboriginal people.



## WCC women - shaking ecumenical foundations?

Watch the old black and white footage of the opening of the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 and you'll see a procession of top hats and balding heads - many in clerical garb.

Women are notable only for their absence.

Nowadays, while the 'absences' may not be quite as easy to spot, the Canberra Assembly still offered some pertinent reminders that all is not well for women.

One sensational revelation, made by Canadian delegate Lois Wilson, was that women were crying in washrooms because they faced intimidation from male representatives if they did not fall from nominations to WCC committees.

She claimed that at least one had been threatened with excommunication by her metropolitan (bishop).

The goal of having 50% women representatives on the WCC Central Committee has not yet been reached, said Annathai Abayasekera from Sri Lanka.

Then of course there was Dr Chung. Rejecting what she called the macho warrior god, hers was

a feminist presentation both in content and style - and it ruffled feathers. The Orthodox plainly said they didn't like it. But there were others too, who really squirmed at the idea of a young Asian woman addressing the Assembly with such force.

Violence against women was also a frightening undercurrent of the Assembly.

Media reports filtered through of allegations that a female delegate had been sexually assaulted by a male delegate.

At the pre-assembly women's forum, a Canadian participant recalled the 1989 Montreal massacre where one man entered a university campus and shot and killed 14 women. He then killed himself, leaving a note which said he killed the women because they were feminists and he hated feminists.

Aboriginal women spoke of being taken from their parents and generally living in a culture of injustice and violence. And others from all over the world told of the particular brutalities suffered by women and children in times of war.

WCC visitors also learned of an Australian ecumenical program called Project Anna which





aims to educate clergy and lay leaders about the realities of sexual violence at home and how they can support abused women and children.

Aruna Gnanadason, secretary for the WCC's sub-unit on women, noted that "disempowerment and frustration" were tantamount for women in an assembly such as this "where men make long speeches" and generally dominate discussion.

Against this backdrop, WomenSpace with its alternative programs and entertainment along with opportunities for networking and timeout was salvific.

A large and beautifully decorated tent became the welcome space and point of real connection for many women.



## Ecumenical Decade

In Canberra in 1991, the symbolism used at the plenary session on the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women was almost as telling as Amsterdam's bald heads. To show the faith, hope and pain of the decade's progress, a large wooden cross was *partially* 'greened' with leaves and branches.

The Ecumenical Decade was launched by the WCC in Easter of 1988 with the aim of encouraging churches to help empower women to participate fully in church and society.

While many speakers at that plenary detailed the 'greening' going on in their countries for women as a result of the decade, others indicated the churches' ambivalence - and in some cases, their misogyny.

"The total church has not adequately claimed the Decade... or responded to the challenge it poses to be in solidarity with women", said the pre-assembly women's meeting statement.

"Some say it's a decade of... *women* in solidarity with *churches* as it has always been", said Birgitta Larsson of Sweden, "or of *women* in solidarity with *women*".

Others are not so pessimistic and see the 'greening' making more headway. Gnanadason herself says "women have shaken the foundations of the ecumenical movement" and even the men who resist change realise things will never be the same as in the past.

The Rev Anne Ryan, Chairperson of the UCA Assembly's Commission on Women and Men also believes the time for solidarity is upon us.

"Broadly speaking the issues that are important to women across the world are the same", she said. "Justice, right relationships, freedom from violence... and women's time has come. The impetus for liberation is everywhere and I don't think it can be stopped".



## Dynamic visitors' program a real winner

Many of the most positive reports received back from the Assembly came from the visitors.

But what was it that made the visitors' experience so good?

Was it the four bible studies led alternately by an African, a Pakistani, a Latin American and an Australian? Or the 100 small bible study groups which, to some, formed the "heart of the visitors program"?

Or being addressed by outstanding people like

Bishop Ting, President of the China Christian Council and Philip Potter, that articulate and hardy ecumenist?

Or maybe it was taking part in the 60 electives offered. Eight electives each day looked at subjects related to the four assembly subthemes. Others included *Come and meet*, with speakers like the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives of the South African Council of Churches and *Pressurepoints* which focused on places and issues like South Africa, Third World Tourism and refugees.



Or could it have been joining daily in worship with Assembly delegates and hearing them pray in myriad different languages "thy will be done"?

Or experiencing the beauty and spirituality of the Aboriginal artwork on display at the High Court - or knuckling down to an Aussie BBQ together on the last evening?

That so many groups were associated with the visitors program could be another answer. Along with key participants from WomenSpace, 60 young people attending a parallel youth camp and more than 60 theological students doing a course on Ecumenics all took part in the program in an integrated and vital way.

Whatever the reason, the program was a *tour de force* of organisation and community building.

What to do with 1300-or-so visitors made up of roughly 700 Aussies, 300 North Americans, 100 New Zealanders, sundry youth, theological

students and 15-20 people specially brought in from Asia and the Pacific, must have been a hard question for the Geneva and Australian-based visitors' committees to answer.

"It seems easy now it's finished," said the UC's John Mavor, who moderated the Australian visitors' committee.

"In the planning stages we gave a lot of attention to the dynamic," he said.

"While not detracting from the Assembly itself, we wanted visitors to experience something in their own right and to have an identity."

John firmly believes that this is what gave people such a good feeling about it.

Learning from that experience, it has been suggested that a visitors' program become part of the 1994 UCA Assembly in NSW.



## Youth urge - cut the "old bull"

'Ecumenical suicide' was the dramatic banner unfurled by youth at the a WCC Assembly plenary expressing their frustration at having only eight per cent of the seats on the new Central Committee.

A tersely-worded statement followed: "The nominations process is outmoded and divisive to the point of being anti-ecumenical, and it is not capable of ensuring adequate representation of young people, women and the differently abled.

"It inhibits the formation of the future ecumenical generation."

Youth at the Assembly and at the pre-assembly youth meeting clearly faced some very real tensions with the WCC and with their own churches.

According to UCA youth delegate, Dianne Trenaman (Perth), the processes of the WCC were "frustrating" and overshadowed the discussion of important matters.

In spite of this she was keen to see an ecumenical youth network set up in WA as a practical result of the WCC.

Others also expressed their despondency.

Douglas J Bixby from the USA writing in the Youth Newsletter of the Assembly put it strongly.

"The origin and history of the ecumenical movement owes a great deal of gratitude to young people and students' movements," he writes.

However, at the moment, it seems that "the 'one church' needs young adults more than young adults need what they are receiving from the

WCC".

It would appear, he argues, that the WCC wants young people in leadership only so that they will "take the bull by the horn" and continue down the "same old road" into the future.

But young people do not want to bring the same old "bull" into their generation of the church, Bixby said. They would rather have the chance to "critique and modify the structures" so that a "new sense of life and fire can be brought into the movement towards unity".

"The WCC" he says, "needs to leave the old bull behind and give birth to a new calf".

That the target of 20 per cent youth representation at the Assembly itself was nowhere near met was cited as a clear indication of the crisis of youth within the churches as a whole.

"Seventy per cent of young people in North Atlantic churches this Sunday will leave those churches, never to return," said the youth statement. "The main reason given by those leaving for this exodus is the church's failure to take young people seriously and include them in significant roles."

A good deal of the youth's frustration was focussed on the nominations committee.

Mr Martin Heider, quoted in the Assembly's newspaper *Assemblyline* said he noticed while working for the committee that it was more bothered about the Orthodox and women's quotas than about the youth. And, in the first place very few churches had submitted the names of youth. While most of the youth seemed happy about the inclusion of a WCC youth president for the first time, some were cynical that this was merely a token.

"As happy as we were to be granted a youth president for the first time, we lament the fact that youth representation on the Central Committee will be only eight per cent," wrote Sue McNally-Worrell

from the USA in the WCC Youth Newsletter.

"These churches - our churches - have let us and themselves down again."



## We were there! UCA presence at the WCC

Did you know that of the 4,000 people present at the WCC Assembly, close to 700 were from the Uniting Church?

Along with our seven official delegates, 400 were accredited visitors, others were day visitors or volunteers and 20 or 30 had specific responsibilities.

UCA President, Ron Wilson, chaired all media conferences at the Assembly and 10 UCA journalists teamed up with others from the New Zealand paper *Crosslink* to cover the event for our publications.

A number of UCA people also took part in an editing task group which produced a WCC follow up study and action guide for Australian churches. The guide was published by the Australian Council of Churches and distributed by the Joint Board.

The Rev Rex Hunt, Assembly Communications Director, worked with the Christian Television Association to produce television coverage. And the Rev John Mavor, Secretary of National Mission

and Evangelism organised the Australian input into the visitors' program.

Jean Gledhill (Epping, NSW), co-ordinated the WomenSpace tent and the Rev Ron Reeson (Canberra) was chairperson of the executive committee with oversight for local arrangements.

Members of the UCA Assembly's Commission on Women and Men ran a workshop for visitors and Uniting Aboriginal Christian Congress representative Dorothy Harris played a key part in a plenary on Aboriginal women's spirituality.

Several UCA people also had significant roles in the life and work of the WCC since the Vancouver Assembly. Not least of these is Jean Skuse, longstanding member of the WCC Central and Executive Committees and full-time Australian co-ordinator for the WCC Assembly since 1988.

These are only a handful of examples of how we were involved. It's good to know so many of us took part in this important event.



## Mission provides theme and context of Assembly

'*Forward Together*' was the theme and the resolve of the Sixth Assembly of the Uniting Church, with mission providing the backdrop to many debates and decisions - especially on ministry.

Proposals for a renewed diaconate, creation of the new category of Community Minister, and official designation of the ministry of Youth Worker, received resounding endorsement, setting the stage for new thrusts of ministry into the many different community settings across Australia.

While ministry issues dominated, other debates included sexuality, Aboriginal concerns, youth and children in the church, sexual violence, alcohol, and migrant ethnic congregations.

Some 268 ministers and lay persons from each of the 55 presbyteries and seven synods attended the triennial Assembly, held from July 14-20 in Brisbane. Other participants included over 30 ecumenical guests from Australian or overseas churches, and - for the first time - four inter-faith guests (two Muslim, two Jewish).

The Assembly began with the installation of Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood - a former theological professor, now a parish minister from Canberra and an

Australian leader in doctrine and liturgy - as the sixth President. The installation service on the opening night was a colourful and culturally diverse celebration, with Tongan church members playing a prominent role recalling Dr Wood's birth in that country.

The following night saw the launch of '*Forward Together*', a nationwide vision for mission and evangelism for the 1990s which aims to stimulate every council of the church to be engaged in intentional mission, outreach and compassionate service.

On ministry, the Assembly brought to fruition 12 years of consultation and five reports by approving a model for a renewed diaconate. The ministry of Deacon will replace the existing Deaconess order, and will focus on justice and compassion in community-based ministries to complement the ministry of the Word. It decided that while the distinctive elements of call, training and settlement of each ministry should be preserved, there should be one ordination with two accreditations - either to ministry of the Word or Deacon.

In addition, assembly established the new category of Community Minister, an ordained ministry designed particularly to recognise and release people for ministry leadership for places of





particular missional need or speciality - such as isolated mining towns, rural areas and migrant sub-cultures.

The ministry of Youth Worker was officially recognised, and brought under the oversight of the Assembly in terms of training and employment conditions.

A Committee on Ministry will be established to help implement these and other changes, in consultation with synods and presbyteries. The Commission on Doctrine also has been asked to explore proposals to free up regulations governing lay presidency at the sacraments.

Many of the training and accreditation needs that will arise as a consequence of these decisions will begin to be met in 1992 through a new national program of distance theological education, to operate from Trinity College, Brisbane, under the auspices of the Ministerial Education

**decisions as Christians**, which had been approved by the Standing Committee and published in March "as a resource paper to encourage reflection on issues important for contemporary Christians".

A move to have that booklet withdrawn from sale, pending a fuller study and more authoritative document, was defeated. Assembly also refused - for the second time in two meetings - to endorse the policy formula of "celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage".

The prevalence of sexual abuse and violence, in the community and within the church, was highlighted by the first report of the new Commission on Women and Men. Assembly resolved "that sexual violence be deplored as a sin against God and humanity".

It confessed that sexual violence "is disturbingly frequent within the Uniting Church community as it



Commission.

Assembly authorised the MEC to take responsibility for this.

Matters of sexuality and gender also provided vigorous debate. Assembly decided to undertake a major six-year study on human sexuality, taking on board a wide range of theological, ethical, biblical, medical and sociological views and skills.

The task group's brief will include: analysing the changes which are occurring; providing a framework for discussion including consideration of the role of scripture; sexuality and spirituality; and various specific issues relating to sexuality. There will be hearings, study processes for church members and widespread consultation, with an interim report for the 1994 Assembly and the final report in 1997.

The issue was raised because of concerns about an eight-page booklet, **Sexuality: Making**

is in the wider community", and that the church's response in the past often had been inappropriate, and so "been experienced by many as a further violation". Assembly recognised "the urgent need for the church community to become part of a 'network of prevention' in the area of sexual violence".

Assembly also resolved that national boards, commissions and agencies must have at least one-third membership of each gender - and, from 1997, "as near as practical to one-half". This reinstates and extends the initial gender balances which applied for six years from the time of church union in 1977.

Multicultural and Aboriginal concerns received wide discussion. Assembly agreed to absolve certain culturally-specific congregations from needing to fulfil all regulations pertaining to Uniting Church parish life. A policy proposed to help give migrant ethnic congregations greater access to, and control of, Uniting Church properties was



referred to Standing Committee, when it was suggested it also apply to Aboriginal congregations.

The age-old issue of alcohol abstinence was given a fresh perspective when the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress asked the Assembly to endorse their concerns about alcohol and drug abuse. After considerable debate, assembly resolved to invite church leaders and members to "adopt a personal and communal lifestyle which reflects solidarity with those who struggle against alcohol and other drugs, and which declares to all that alcohol and other drugs are not essential elements for fulfilment or satisfying living."

Leaders and members are also invited to discover first-hand the problems among Aboriginals that lead to alcohol abuse, and to stand with them in addressing these needs. Assembly also undertook to support Aborigines in northern Western Australia who are pressing what could be a landmark land rights claim.

The process of covenanting between the UAICC and the rest of the Uniting Church has been given a longer timetable than that adopted in 1988, because of the time needed to clarify and establish certain procedures. Synods now are asked to consider covenanting ceremonies at their 1992 or 1993 meetings, and an Australia-wide workshop will be held in anticipation of a national covenant being celebrated at the 1994 Assembly.

On ecumenical and inter-faith matters, assembly endorsed statements from the dialogues with the Lutheran and Anglican Churches - the latter of which could lead to eucharistic sharing between the Anglican and Uniting Churches. Greetings came from national leaders of the Jewish and Muslim communities - a first for any Australian church. (The Uniting Church is the only Australian church in official dialogue with Muslims.) Most of

the ecumenical guests, from Australia and overseas, participated in daily "guest spots" which many people agreed were a highlight of the week.

Assembly elected Mrs Jill Tabart of Launceston as its first woman and second lay President, to take office in 1994. Jill is 50, a medical doctor and former synod moderator, is vice-president of the Tasmanian Council of Churches, a member of the Assembly's Commission on Ecumenical Affairs, and was one of seven official Uniting Church delegates at the World Council of Churches' Seventh Assembly in Canberra last February.

In other decisions and activities, the Assembly:

- resolved not to introduce the office of Bishop, at least for the time being.
- allocated two of the 18 elected positions on Standing Committee to young people (under 25);
- asked parish elders to work hard at including children in worship, congregational learning programs and holy communion;
- heard distinguished Taiwanese biblical scholar Dr Choan-Seng Song deliver daily bible studies and the Cato Lecture on the theme of Christianity in a religiously plural world;
- heard that financial exigencies and reduced funding support from the synods was jeopardising the future viability of the Assembly;
- deferred for further consideration a proposal to introduce a rite for the recollection of baptism in which water would be used;
- accepted a new vow to be put to ordinands, on their commitment to working for justice, peace and outreach into the community



## Forward Together: a vision unfolds

The church needs to recognise and lift up its prophets in a culture that tends to crush those people who have a dream. So said Rev Dorothy McMahon, chairperson of National Mission and Evangelism, in presenting the 'Forward Together' vision for mission to the Assembly.

Following an audio-visual presentation of the Australian culture and people (from the "Gathering under the Southern Cross" event held in Canberra for the World Council of Churches Assembly), Dorothy said it was for these people that a vision for mission had evolved.

She said each church member would need an understanding of what they must do, to fulfil this vision of people discovering new life and hope through the Spirit.

Referring to Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter, she said many in the church felt they were too tired, too near death... "we must allow Jesus to lift us up". Christians must go out simply as they were, as ordinary people, and share where they were at - mistakes and all.

Dorothy said testimonies of pain and hope must be shared if the church was to relate to the world around it. She spoke of Abigail, 26, a former alcoholic (whose family has 10 alcoholics in two generations) who is a miracle in the midst of the Pitt St (Sydney) congregation. Such was her enthusiasm to play an active role in the life of the church, Dorothy said, that Abigail had approached people at every level - parish, presbytery and synod - to find out what she could do.



An excellent drama presentation using humour addressed commonly-held fears about "evangelism". Two Brisbane actors raised much laughter in portraying how our fear can make evangelism a dreaded task when it should be a natural extension of our faith and life in Christ.

The secretary of National Mission and Evangelism, Rev John Mavor, who will head up 'Forward Together', said the quality of the life of Christians should be reaching out and touching the lives of people around them.

In its resolutions, Assembly welcomed the *Forward Together* initiative, which has been developed in response to the request of the

Standing Committee in 1988 for an indication of "ways and means of increasing the missionary impact of the church in our changing society".

It recognised that the 1990s present special challenges for ecumenical mission, and it impressed upon synods, presbyteries and parishes the importance of developing an appropriate mission response in each local situation "so that every council, congregation and agency of the church is engaged in intentional mission outreach and compassionate service".

Assembly also asked its agencies to exercise leadership in ways which encourage positive movement 'Forward Together' in mission by the whole church.

## Ministry gets a reshaping

Ministry was a major concern at the Sixth Assembly in Brisbane. Deacons are to become a 'renewed ministry' and will be ordained via the same ordination as ministers of the Word. A new ordained ministry - community minister - is to be open to either the ministry of the Word or ministry of Deacon. And 'youth worker' becomes one of the Uniting Church's 'specified ministries', along with the ministries of lay preacher and lay pastor.

### Deacons

Deacons are to become a 'renewed ministry' (of the diaconate) in the Uniting Church. The ministry of Deacon will be an ordained ministry, along with the ministry of the Word.

And the Uniting Church will recognise only one ordination, with ministers being accredited to either the ministry of Deacon or ministry of the Word.

The decision on the diaconate has taken five assemblies, 12 years of consultation and five substantial reports to the Assembly. As Deaconess Bev Fabb said to the Sixth Assembly, "Deaconesses have been in limbo for 12 years".

Indeed, men have been able to become 'deaconesses' for some years now but have been unable to adopt the gender-free title 'deacon' because of the processes the church has been going through over the whole question of ministry. The ministry of Deacon, as now adopted by assembly, is not the former ministry of Deaconess in new guise. The former ministry of service lacked clearly defined theological rationale, focus and functions, resulting in confusion and misunderstanding, said the **Report on Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia**. This was because the Uniting Church had inherited different understandings of this ministry from its parent denominations.

"Ordained deacons hold before the church the model of service among those who suffer, and call the members to engage in such service. In their ministry they model Christ the servant", the report

states. "This role is uniquely Christian and has no counterpart in secular organisations."

Deacons will be part of a worshipping community, though often in ministry outside 'the church'. They will have a liturgical role appropriate to their particular ministry, with authority to preside over the sacraments.

### Community minister

The proposal which generated most debate was the one to introduce the concept of community ministry.

Community ministers will not necessarily be fully stipended. They will most likely serve in remote areas or with groups isolated by language, ethnicity or culture. They will be ordained and accredited either as minister of the Word or Deacon.

There are church members "who have obvious gifts for a ministry which offers both leadership and equipping of the local community through preaching and pastoral care", the report says. "While experiencing a call to ministry, these people have not felt called to ministry of the Word or Deacon."

The ministry task group recognised there was "a risk attached to this proposal", but felt the advantages outweighed the risks.

The task group stipulated that it was not: designing a back-door path to traditional ordained ministry; recommending that someone take up full-time settlement in a busy parish, work for a living, study, be responsible for a family; recommending the ordination of people with no theological education or formation, nor that such people would preside at the sacraments; providing a way for parishes to put pressure on ministers to accept a reduced stipend and conditions.

After the Assembly had finally adopted the recommendation for community ministry, there was an attempt to rescind the motion. It was



suggested that the proposal be further developed by Standing Committee, and that it be considered at the next assembly.

A vote by ballot, though passed by simple majority, did not gain the necessary two thirds majority, and leave was not granted to reopen the debate.

### Youth worker

The Uniting Church has about 140 youth workers across the nation. Now this ministry has gained formal recognition as a 'specified ministry' of the church.

Along with the recognition comes "an opportunity for the Uniting Church to order its life and work with young people". There will be appropriate training, appointment, employment conditions, accountability and pastoral care for youth workers.

Present youth workers "are dedicated, gifted and called. They have offered an enormous amount to the mission of the church, both in terms of their ministry with young people and the way in which they have often pushed us to adapt and develop our life in order to include young people more fully", the report said.

### Lay preachers and pastors

Lay preacher and lay pastor will become formalised as 'specified ministries'.

Lay pastors will become entitled to the same stipend and allowances as ordained ministers. Their ministry will be envisaged as essentially short-term, for not more than ten years, with a minimum three year term.

## President elect: no token woman

"In gospel terms a leader is one who serves", said Mrs Jill Tabart, president-elect of the UCA, the day after her election.

Jesus makes it clear in the gospels that there are no differences between people and all are created in the image of God with a "special giftedness" to be used in service, said Jill. However, due to the influence of secular understandings of hierarchical leadership, we don't always get this concept of leadership right.

### "Token woman" role not on

When asked if she had fears of being the "token woman," in her new position, Jill conceded that there "may be some people who see me that way".

"I don't see it like that," she said. "And I wouldn't have agreed to be President if I thought that was

They will be presbytery members, and entrance qualifications will be standardised, taking into account personal qualities, experience and academic attainment. Theological education by extension (distance education) will be a study option.

### One ordination

The proposed one ordination with two accredited ministries was a matter of some contention in the Assembly. The debate illustrated the Uniting Church's dilemma in that it has yet to develop a definitive theology of ordination. What it does have is a 'description' of ordination, recorded in the minutes of the 1985 Assembly (page 77).

The ministry task group considered that of all the favoured ordination possibilities, the 'one ordination, two accreditations' option is the most satisfactory. It bears witness to the one ministry of Christ; integrates the special ministries of the Word and Deacon; and shows neither ministry is complete without the other.

"We have not foreclosed the discussion about the nature of ordination but have chosen to speak of one ordination which reflects the unity of the triune God" the task group said in its report. "We have also chosen to speak of two strands of ministry. Both are gifts of the risen Lord and share with all God's people the great responsibility of pointing to the Saviour."

The task group said it was important to over-emphasise the place of mission in ministry. This was necessary "to break out of the strong commitment to the maintenance of the present ordering."

what the church was doing.

"The Assembly's acceptance of the announcement of my position affirmed to me that the church doesn't see me as a token woman. I also intend to demonstrate that this is not a token role," she said.

Thanks to her longstanding involvement in the Tasmanian and the Australian Councils of Churches and the Assembly's Commission on Ecumenical Affairs Jill has already met many of the church leaders she will deal with in her new role.

That such church leaders are mostly men doesn't faze her.

"To some extent I fought this battle when I was moderator of the Tasmanian synod," she said.





"And any awkwardness (these church leaders had) about having to relate to a woman didn't persist... and we worked together well".

When asked how she will juggle her professional responsibilities and presidential commitments, Jill quipped happily "it will be fun won't it!"

She added she had served the church for many years - and the colleagues with whom she is in medical practice had always been open and flexible about her church involvement.

### **Small groups vital**

The church is a "living, breathing, organic body," said Jill, and the smaller nurture groups are vital both in large and in small congregations - because it is in these groups that "we relate to people as *people*".

The church comes alive when people can relate to each other, listen to each other, discover things together... agonise over situations and struggle with how they can live out their faith in the community, she said.

### **Sexual violence: educate for change**

On the issue of sexual violence, Jill said the way it has been hidden is probably the biggest problem.

The fact we're at a point in society where people

are willing to talk about the issue - and, however tentatively, bring it out into the open - is significant, she said.

Like with most things that are wrong in society, Jill believes, legislative decisions can't solve the problem of sexual violence. However educative processes, and changing people's understanding of issues like this can bring reform.

How we bring people to the realisation that they need to change, is where the challenge lies, she said.

### **Background**

Jill comes from Launceston and is a former moderator of the Synod of Tasmania. She was elected vice-president of the Tasmanian Council of Churches in May.

She will take office as president for three years from the next Assembly of the church, to be held in NSW in 1994.

A member of Tamar-Esk presbytery, Jill is also the Medical Officer for Health with the Launceston City Council, and a school medical officer for the state government, practising as Dr Jill Holm.

Her professional interest in healing and wholeness would be a gift she would offer the church both in pastoral ministry and in ecumenical relations during her presidency, she said.

# Cultures must be transformed 'from the inside'

Christians should not expect to transform cultures by imposing theology from the outside. Rather, theologians must recognise that every culture has deep within it elements of self-purification and transformation which could be given fresh impetus and power by the gospel.

That was a key theme in the 1991 Cato Lecture, delivered by Dr Choan-Seng Song at Albert St Uniting Church on the Tuesday night of the Assembly.

Dr Song, a Taiwanese scholar and author, is Professor of Theology and Asian Culture at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

Using the title "The Stranger on the Shore", Dr Song linked the encounter between Jesus and the first disciples on the shores of Lake Gennesaret, with encounters between Christians and people of other cultures and religions who are, for us, the stranger on the shore.

Historically, he said, Christians arriving at new shores despised these strangers and refused to learn from them. Today, though, Christians could no longer ignore the cultures and religions of their neighbours but had to make theological sense of them.

Defining culture in terms of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and customs, Dr Song said consideration of culture must not be in the abstract but be firmly grounded within the ideals, hopes and values of each human society.

Further, Christians in the past had often negated an entire culture because of its dark side, and converts were urged to reject their traditional culture wholesale. Yet while every culture had its flaws, it also had its "capacity to purge itself of wrongs and abuses that mar it".

"In our eagerness to pose 'Christian' culture

as embodiment of God's truths, over against other cultures as representing nothing but unsavoury aspects of human nature, we Christians have tended not to take account of this self-purging capacity of other cultures," he said.

Dr Song told an Indonesian folk tale about a high-ranking man, his wife, and his mother who murders their infant son, to illustrate how cultures can identify and address the good and evil in their traditions and social patterns.

Jesus did the same, he said, in the critique he offered Jewish culture of his day. "Jesus did not pose himself as against, for or above his own culture in its entirety. He was not even out to transform it," Dr Song said.

"What he did do was to point out in no uncertain terms the distortion of the very spirit that created the religious community and to castigate the misuse of ethical demands derived from that spirit."

Beyond vehement criticism, Jesus also "sought to bring out the best in the religious culture of his day and urged the reconstruction of the community on it. That reconstructed community he envisioned he called 'the reign of God'."

Dr Song said the question for Christians was "not so much how to transform a culture, as how to resonate with those self-purifying elements that generate the power of transformation from within," he said.

"In this, we may gain a deeper understanding of how the Spirit is at work in the human community outside Christianity as well as inside it."

The lecture, which began in Methodist General Conferences in 1935 and has been a feature of each Assembly, honours pioneering Methodist layman Fred J Cato of Victoria.



# Banner speaks of Aboriginal spirituality

The whole message of ancient Aboriginal spirituality both influencing and being influenced by the Christian gospel comes through in the 'Forward Together' banner made by women students from Nungalinga College for the Assembly.

So said Adi Dunlop from Nungalinga College, who helped work on the banner - designed by Marjorie Morgan, an Aboriginal woman originally from the Daley River area.

Twelve women in Nungalinga's 'Bicultural Life Studies' class worked on the banner each day once their normal classes were completed. Sometimes their children and husbands would join

them and work through into the evenings.

"Once Marjorie had finished the original design, we mapped it out on big bed sheets sewn together. These were the only things big enough to give us the 30 by 20 feet required. It filled our rather small room at Nungalinga," said Adi.

While not wishing to put any "hard edged meaning to it," she said, a number of ideas flowed through the women as they worked.

For example the hands were originally in pure black. Then it was decided that the white should be added to show that while the Aboriginal people were the original inhabitants - then the white people came. Now these two peoples make a very exciting pattern - and the hands placed over the cross are also raised in praise.

## The Trinity symbolised

The Trinity can also be seen in the banner, said Adi. God the Father is represented by a pure white circle in the centre of the cross - a symbol suggested by one of the women, who is also an artist, taking part in the class.

The cross symbolises Jesus and the wavy, radiating lines and dots show the movement of the Spirit. Light also radiates from the centre of the cross.

The colours are mainly Aboriginal earth colours - though painted in fabric paint and not the traditional ochres.

"Some red spots flowing from the cross are like spots of Jesus' blood. The gold around the white circle is more of a resurrection colour," said Adi.

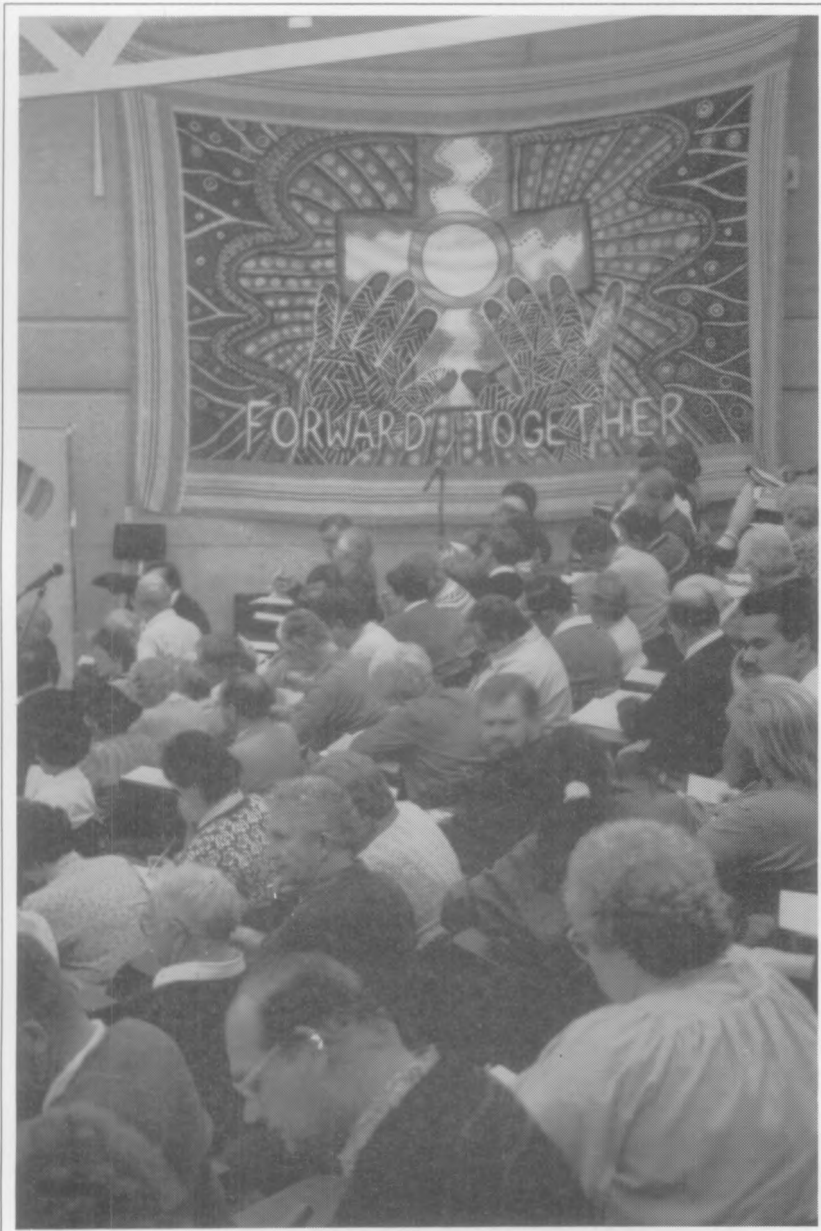
"So many spiritual ideas are communicated through art by Aboriginal people... and Nungalinga now has quite a library of banners which we have built up.

"The banners are like transportable rock paintings, and they can even be hung from trees" said Adi.

"It would be good if the theological students would do more banners - but the women have really taken the lead in this area."

Nungalinga's 'Bicultural Life Studies' class covers many practical subjects such as literacy and numeracy, enterprise, health and culture. Adi is Support Co-ordinator for the course.

Nungalinga is an Anglican-Uniting theological college for Aboriginal and Islander people in Darwin.





# If you would like more information...

Each year many of the Assembly agencies produce discussion papers, publicity material and other items of information which are distributed throughout sections of the church.

Even so, there are many people who are interested in the issues and information but who never seem to get hold of those papers.

If you would like to be put on the mailing list of any of the Assembly agencies to receive material as it is produced, or receive copies of material produced in 1991 (see over) please complete the form below and return it to:

Assembly Communications Unit  
PO Box E266  
St James NSW 2000

\*\*\*\*\*

- Please keep me in touch.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please  which agency you would like to be kept in touch with)

- Liturgy
- World Mission
- Stewardship Australia
- Social Responsibility & Justice
- Joint Board of Christian Education
- Ecumenical Affairs
- Frontier Services
- Commission for Mission
- Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress
- Women & Men
- National Mission & Evangelism
- Communications
- Secretariat

# List of Publications printed during 1992

## Frontier Services

- |                          |                                |           |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Frontier News (4 times a year) | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Kid's Pack                     | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card                 | ea \$0.30 |

## World Mission

- |                          |   |           |
|--------------------------|---|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | World Mission Partners (3 times a year) | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Programs and Projects                   | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Annual leaflet                          | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Interns in Mission reportback:          |           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "Tell the tourists"                     | ea \$5.00 |

## UAICC

- |                          |                |           |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Message Stick  | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card | ea \$0.35 |

## National Mission & Evangelism

- |                          |  |      |
|--------------------------|--|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Prayer letter  | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MITAL - Newsletter on ministry in<br>Tourism and Leisure | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | "Forward Together" pamphlet                              | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Going Forward Together - newsletter                      | Free |

## Secretariat/ASC

- |                          |                                      |      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Working Together Nationally (annual) | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Neighbours - newsletter              | Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Assembly Update (10 issues)          | Free |

## Ecumenical Affairs

- |                          |             |      |
|--------------------------|-------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Newsletters | Free |
|--------------------------|-------------|------|

## Liturgy

- |                          |                                |        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Springboards (3 issues a year) | \$3.00 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|

## Stewardship Australia

- |                          |                     |      |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Planned Giving News | Free |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------|

## JBCE

- |                          |                           |      |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Catalogue of publications | Free |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------|

## CFM

- |                          |  |           |
|--------------------------|--|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mission Prayer Handbook 1993 -<br>'And there is God' | \$3.00    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Missionprobe - the Kimberley land<br>claim trust     | Free      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christmas card                                       | ea \$0.35 |

## Communications

- |                          |   |        |
|--------------------------|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The Uniting Church and television -<br>Towards a national policy? | \$2.00 |
|--------------------------|---|--------|

## Women & Men

### Occasional papers:

- |                          |  |        |
|--------------------------|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Divorce and its causes   | \$0.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Power and our abuse  | \$0.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sexual violence and the Church community                         | \$0.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Eset Hayil</i> , Women of substance<br>(Proverbs 31: 13 - 31) | \$0.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Women disciples at the Last Supper                               | \$0.50 |

## Social Responsibility & Justice

- |                          |   |      |
|--------------------------|---|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Social Justice Sunday - Liturgy & Preaching<br>resources on domestic violence | Free |
|--------------------------|---|------|

Sub-total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

+ 10% for postage/package \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \$

## Working Together Nationally

is an annual publication raising issues and providing reports and articles from Assembly agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia for synods and parishes

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**WORKING TOGETHER  
NATIONALLY**

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## From the President

When the **Basis of Union** describes the structure of the Uniting Church, it places the congregation first. This is for good reason.

The congregation is the place where the Word is preached, the sacraments celebrated and where most (by no means all) of the pastoral care takes place. In the congregation people are nurtured, and encouraged in their discipleship.

The congregation and parish are also mission bodies. They reach into the community with proclamation, with compassionate service and by seeking after justice for all in the community.

More is happening in our 1,000 parishes than any one person can comprehend. When I travel around Australia I am impressed again and again by the quantity of Christian work that is carried on under the name of the Uniting Church.

Where does the Assembly, our national council, fit into all this?

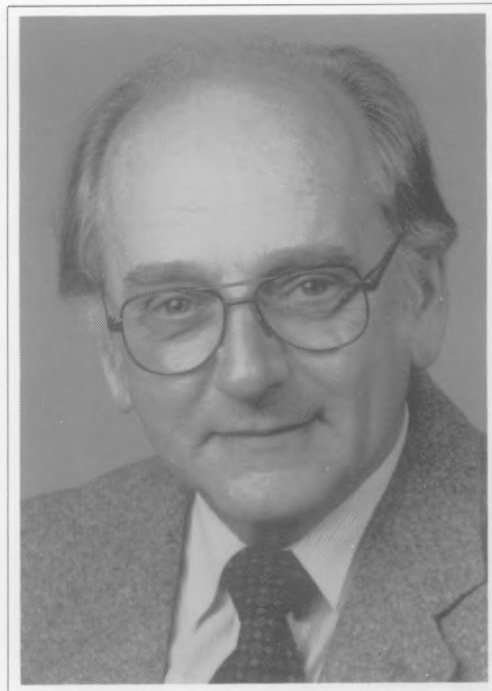
I believe we can see the role of the Assembly, in relation to congregations, in two ways. **The first** is support and encouragement. This happens through information about mission, provision of educational and other resources, and a host of other ways.

**Second**, the Assembly is like an extension of the work of the congregation - a stretched out arm, if you like.

The Assembly acts on behalf of the whole church in ecumenical dialogue and co-operation, by relating to many churches overseas, by reaching into outback Australia, and by addressing issues of social responsibility that are nation-wide in their scope. And there are many other "on behalf" activities which are detailed in this edition of **Working Together Nationally**. I hope readers will take the time to familiarise themselves with the range of Assembly work, and then put other parish, presbytery and synod members in touch with those activities.

Word of mouth is the best way of passing on the information and the vision of our national church. So I would ask readers to be representatives: people who will represent the work of the whole Uniting Church accurately and enthusiastically.

The Uniting Church is a combination of



groups which stay **in touch**. Technically we call this "inter-related councils". The vision is of a network of congregations and councils which take responsibility for each other, and which seek to confess Christ before the world with a united voice.

Congregations or individuals which disregard the rest of the church do themselves, and everyone else, a great disservice. It is my hope the Uniting Church will develop a greater unity, a greater mutual responsibility and a greater co-operation, for the sake of our common goal. What is that goal? One way of saying it is this - to live the Christian life in such a way that the face of Christ is seen unmistakably in all parts of our Australian society.

Going **Forward Together** in this way involves **awareness**, and part of awareness is **communication**. **Working Together Nationally** is an important element in the large network of communication which binds us in fellowship and common service of the gospel.

May the Holy Spirit inspire the prayers and direct the work of all our people, and use us to God's glory.

D'Arcy Wood  
President of the Assembly