

WE ARE A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

In 2015 we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia declaration "We are a multicultural church".

CELEBRATING
30
YEARS 1985-2015

A statement adopted by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, May 1985

1. The Uniting Church in Australia is a union of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Its unity is both the gift of God through Christ who is the head of the Church and the fruit of the labours of those who sought to be responsive to the prayer of Christ that his disciples might be one.
2. The Basis of Union points to the fact that the Uniting Church unites not only three former denominations, but also Christians of many cultures and ethnic origins. Paragraph 2 states the Uniting Church "believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries." Jesus Christ has made peace between people of every race, culture and class. This unity too is a gift of God, a foretaste of the reconciliation of all things in Christ. It is also a goal to be achieved as we commit ourselves in one fellowship to achieve justice, affirm one another's cultures, and care for any who are the victims of racial discrimination, fear and economic exploitation.
3. The 4th Assembly of the Uniting Church welcomes the progress that has been made in the last 20 years towards the formation of a society in Australia in which people of many races and cultures live together. The Assembly rejoices that successive governments have substantially removed racial criteria from the policies covering the selection of migrants and the reception of refugees, and that in particular significant groups of people from Asia and the Pacific have been welcomed to this land.
4. The fact that our membership comprises people of many races, cultures and languages, is a reminder that the church is both product and agent of mission. In the church the Kingdom which is to come is experienced in the ambiguity of the tension between the old age which has not yet passed away and the new age which has not yet fully come. As part of that church which is a sign of and witness to the Kingdom, the multicultural Uniting Church seeks to be a sign of hope within the Australian community, and particularly to those who are pushed to its fringes on racial and economic grounds.
5. It is essential therefore to provide for full participation of Aboriginal and ethnic* people, women and men, in decision making in the councils of the Church; to ensure that these groups have equitable rights in the use of Uniting Church properties and access to its resources; and to include their concerns and perspectives in the agendas of the councils of the Church. The Uniting Church seeks to be open to changes that the Holy Spirit will bring to the Church because of the creative contributions of people of different racial and cultural groups to its life.
6. The ethnic and Aboriginal congregations are a sign of the diversity of the cultures of the members of the Uniting Church. Organisation of the Church in ethnic congregations enables us to worship in familiar languages, to hear the Gospel in terms of our several identities and cultures, and to provide pastoral care for all our people. There is a risk, however, that the establishment of ethnic congregations will become a means whereby the rest of the church is insulated from the hurts and struggles of Australia's minorities. Opportunities should be made therefore for bilingual worship and for fellowship across racial and cultural boundaries.
7. There is a great variety among ethnic congregations. This produces diverse relationships between such congregations and other congregations of the Uniting Church. Situations in which the minister has been settled in Australia for several years will be different from those in which a minister has recently arrived from another country. First generation settlers often seek the security of a congregation of their own culture and traditions. Their desire for such close security is to be respected, and such a congregation may be organised as a parish of the Church. Where there is preparedness to reach out to people of other cultures, the Assembly encourages the establishment of multicultural parishes. It supports a policy in which ministers of different ethnic backgrounds will plan and share the ministry in congregations, some of which are culturally mixed, and some of which meet separately for reasons of language.
8. The Assembly recognises the need for special ministerial education programs to prepare people for ministry in multicultural parishes and ethnic congregations. For those who are to minister in multicultural parishes, sociological studies on contemporary urban society where different cultural groups live side by side and interact will be important. Because the Gospel speaks with direct relevance to situations of political oppression and economic exploitation, an awareness of what is happening at the points of interaction between different racial and cultural groups in Australia will be essential for ministry. The Assembly recognises that candidates for ministry with ethnic congregations need to be aware of the theological and ecclesial traditions of the church(es) from which the members of the congregation have come. Candidates also need to have an opportunity to reflect theologically on the life situation of the members of the congregation here in Australia. This may require theological study in both countries, and effective ministry will certainly be enhanced by field education with a migrant congregation in Australia.
9. The Uniting Church welcomes those Christians of other church traditions who find in the Basis of Union and the life of the Uniting Church a faith community of which they want to be part, but rejects any form of proselytism as inappropriate in the ecumenical fellowship of the church. Presbyteries are encouraged, therefore, to assist ethnic congregations of other Christian traditions to provide adequate pastoral care for their people, and to obtain access to buildings suitable for their needs.

** Note: Since 1985 the phrase "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse" (CALD) is increasingly used across the broader community and is a better and more appropriate descriptor than ethnic for congregations of people from cultures other than Aboriginal or mostly English-speaking descent. Most helpful are the definitions of First Peoples and Second Peoples as used to differentiate between Indigenous peoples and all those who have come later. They remind the whole Church of the diversity of all migrant peoples and of our need for reconciliation and understanding of the unique place and spirituality of First Peoples.*

The expression "intercultural" is also increasingly preferred by some to "multicultural", as it aspires to more intentional embracing of our diversity in the Body of Christ.

