

Assembly Decisions Pertaining to Worship Services

Paper No.13

The Eighth Assembly resolved (Minute 97.17.03) "to request the Commission on Liturgy to prepare a summary of Assembly decisions since union which pertain to worship services in the Uniting Church."

This list may be incomplete, and the Working Group on Worship welcomes any help in making it more comprehensive.

Assembly Minute 79.22(7) *(Baptism):*

"approve the statement, 'A Common Understanding of Baptism and the resolutions appended to it."

This resolution states in part:

"Baptism is administered by washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Such a washing may be by immersion, or pouring or a sprinkling in which the water is seen to flow on the candidate. Baptism so administered may never be repeated".

The resolution further states:

The following elements should also find their place within the order of service for Baptism:

- a. the reading of a passage of scripture related to baptism;
- b. the preaching of the Word, expounding the significance of the sacrament;
- c. the acknowledgement of God's initiative in salvation, of [God's] continuing faithfulness, and of our total dependence on [God's] grace;
- d. the declaration of the forgiveness of sins;
- e. the invocation of the Holy Spirit;
- f. the renunciation of evil;
- g. profession of faith in Christ by the candidate, or by the parents or sponsors;
- h. profession of faith by the congregation;
- i. the promise (in the case of infants) by parents or sponsors to instruct the child in the truths and duties of the Christian faith, and to bring him[/her] up to love and obey the Lord within the family of the Church;
- j. prayer for the person baptised;
- k. the affirmation that the person baptised now belongs to the Holy Catholic Church, is incorporated into the Body of Christ, so becoming a witness to the Gospel;
- l. the reminder to all that Baptism into the people of God leads to a life in the Spirit, nurtured in worship and marked by growth in holiness and obedience.

Assembly Minute 88.24.2 *(Uniting in Worship):*

"To recognise the orders of service contained in the forthcoming publication Uniting in Worship, already examined and approved by the Standing Committee, as official services of the Uniting Church in Australia and to commend them to ministers of the Word, leaders of worship, councils of elders and congregations for their use."

Assembly Minute 88.24.3 *(The trinitarian formula at baptism):*

"That all ministers of the Word and others authorised to administer the sacrament of baptism be required to use

the following words as the baptismal formula, without variation or exception:

NN (Christian names), I baptise you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit."

Assembly Minute 94.18.02 (*from the Commission on Mission, headed **Use of water in the recollection of baptism***):

"(a) to ask congregations to make a greater use of the services of worship contained in *Uniting in Worship* and which are designed to assist individual people, and the congregation as a whole, to reaffirm baptism;

(b) to note that the Commission is continuing the process of exploring the issue of adult people coming to faith and their incorporation into the life of the church and will report further to the next assembly;"

Assembly Resolution 97.17.02 (*Uniting in Worship*):

to determine that the actions of the 1988 Assembly in approving the services in *Uniting in Worship* as authorised for use in the Uniting church constitute the provision of new services for the Church in terms of Clause 59 of the Constitution, and that the orders of service and other rites of the previous denominations are no longer official services within the Uniting Church.

Assembly Resolution 97.17.03 (*Assembly decisions; Ordered Liberty*):

"to request the Commission on Liturgy to prepare a summary of Assembly decisions since union which pertain to worship services in the Uniting Church, and to provide guidance regarding those elements, words or actions which constitute certain services, namely, the Lord's Supper, baptism, ordination, induction and marriage, and that this summary should be provided to all Ministers and parishes subject to approval by the Standing Committee".

Assembly Resolution 97.17.04 (*The Marriage Service*):

"to recognise that The Marriage Service in *Uniting in Worship* is a service of worship, with Scripture readings, proclamation of the Word, prayer and the marriage rite, in which service the following elements constitute 'the rites of the Uniting Church in Australia', recognising the freedoms given for responsible use of alternative wording with the same meaning and intention:

- 4 Declaration of Purpose
- 8 Declaration of Intent
- 11 The Vows (in one of the four forms in *Uniting in Worship*, or in words consistent with these forms)
- 13 Proclamation of the Marriage
- 15 The Blessing (of the couple)

Assembly Resolution 97.31.13 (*A Service of Healing for those whose Marriage is Ending or has Ended*):

"to request the Commission on Liturgy to facilitate the development of pastoral liturgical resources both to recognise the end of a marriage and assist in the process of affirmation, grief, repentance and moving on in God's grace."

Further significant references to worship in Assembly documents

Clause 59, Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, under the general heading INTERIM PROVISIONS.

"Until otherwise determined by the Assembly the orders for the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the several orders of worship and other rites, and hymn books which were authorised or recognised for use in the uniting churches at the time of union shall be recognised for use within the Church."

APPENDIX 1, *Basis of Union*, Concerning the Celebration of the Sacraments

"In paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Basis of Union the Uniting Church receives the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and in paragraphs 5 and 6 she sees these acts as proclamations of the Gospel set forth in Scripture. In order that the sacraments may be administered with due regard to the ends for which they were instituted, the Uniting Church will on an early occasion set up a Committee on Public Worship (or a Liturgical Commission, or some such body) to guide the Church's life of worship. Until the work of such a Committee has been assessed and approved by the appropriate council or councils of the Church, ministers and congregations will continue to be guided by the books used for these purposes in the three Churches at the time of union, namely The Methodist Book of Offices, The Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, A Book of Public Worship and A Book of Services and Prayers.

"In particular the Uniting Church draws the attention of ministers and congregations to the following matters:

1. Concerning Baptism

- (i) the sacrament of Baptism is normally to be celebrated in the presence of a congregation of God's people, or their representatives, who welcome and take responsibility for the one baptised.
- (ii) The context of celebration of the sacrament will be the preaching of the Gospel, and affirmation of faith, and the prayers of the people.
- (iii) A passage of scripture bearing on the significance of the sacrament should be read.
- (iv) Baptism is by water, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- (v) It should be made clear to all present that baptism makes the baptised person a member of the Holy Catholic Church.
- (vi) In normal circumstances, ministers of the Word will administer the sacrament of Baptism.

2. Concerning Holy Communion

- (i) The sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated by a congregation of God's people who wait upon his presence in words read from scriptures, proclaimed in the life of the Church and made evident in the sacramental acts.
- (ii) In every service of the Lord's Supper bread and wine shall be set apart with the use of Christ's words of institution as found in the Gospels or Epistle, and the manual acts there commanded: the breaking of the bread, the taking of the cup, and participation in both kinds by minister and people.
- (iii) In normal circumstances a minister of the Word will preside at celebrations of the sacrament of Holy Communion.
- (iv) The Lord's Table is open to all members of the Uniting Church and to all persons who in any fellowship of

Christ's people may receive Holy Communion in that fellowship."

APPENDIX 2, *Basis of Union*, Concerning the Ordering of the Ministry

3. Ordination

This section mandates the words of the vows, and the prayer at the laying on of hands.

Excerpt from the Preface, *Uniting in Worship*, pp 8-9:

"The status and authority of published services is a matter of some debate within the Uniting Church. It is important to avoid both understatement and overstatement of the authority of *Uniting in Worship*. Its services and resources are not required to be used. Ministers and other worship leaders have the right to use other books, provided that these conform to the doctrine of the Uniting Church. On the other hand, *Uniting in Worship*, with the approval of the Assembly behind it, sets a standard for worship. It is normative in the sense that it is a standard against which other services may be measured.

This does not mean, of course, that the services in *Uniting in Worship* are intended to be used rigidly and without imagination. All worship should be geared to the particular situation of the congregation, be it large or small, urban or rural. All the resources in *Uniting in Worship* are therefore designed to be used in a flexible way. Indeed, most of the services have many options within them, and there are frequent invitations to use free prayer. The Service of the Lord's Day, which is the centre-piece of the book, is a case in point. There is a variety of Great Prayers of Thanksgiving, and at other points in the service the entire content of a prayer must be provided by the leader and congregation. The funeral service contains the greatest number of options, as the Commission believes that many factors combine to make each funeral unique, one which requires careful choice of between various possibilities.

But flexibility is more than choosing between printed options, or composing prayers of intercession, or other prayers for local use. Other factors such as the desired length of the service, the background and history of the congregation, and the people available for leadership will suggest variations from the printed text. This flexibility must be accompanied by responsibility, so that the congregation may be protected from worship which is idiosyncratic or insensitive."