

Decision of the 8th Assembly (1997) in receiving the report, *Uniting Sexuality and Faith*

[Original minutes are online here](#)

97.31 TASK GROUP ON SEXUALITY

The report was presented by Alastair McRae (chairperson) and members of the task group.

The Assembly resolved:

97.31.01 to receive the report;

97.31.02 to determine that:

- (a) any decision which this Assembly makes by formal majority on any matter relating to sexuality shall initially be only provisional;
- (b) before this meeting of the Assembly concludes, the Assembly shall determine whether any or all of the provisional decisions shall be referred to synods and presbyteries for concurrence by a majority of synods and a majority of presbyteries before they take effect;
- (c) the provisional decisions which the Assembly does not decide to refer to synods and presbyteries shall cease to be provisional and shall take effect at the conclusion of this meeting of the Assembly;

97.31.03 to publish and distribute, through the synods, as soon as possible its decisions regarding the final report of the Task Group on Sexuality;

97.31.04 to draw the attention of the Church to the existence of the resource group of persons from each synod established by the National Mission and Evangelism Committee to be available to congregations/parishes to be resource people to Church leaders on how to manage dilemmas arising from Assembly decisions.

97.31.05 to affirm the joys and responsibilities of God's good gift of sexuality;

97.31.06 to reject judgmental attitudes in sexual ethics and witness to the renewing grace of God in this as in all areas of human behaviour;

97.31.07 to recognise the importance of responsible sexual behaviour and that all practices of sexuality which are exploitative and demeaning are unacceptable and contradict God's purposes for us;

97.31.08 (a) to recognise that the work of the Task Group on Sexuality is another step in the Church's exploration of issues of sexuality and that *Uniting Sexuality & Faith* is a resource for study, discussion and dialogue;

(b) to acknowledge the diversity of human relationships in which Uniting Church members are involved and the different Biblical, theological, ethnic and cultural responses of groups within the Church to these relationships;

97.31.09 to establish the policy that Uniting Church marriage celebrants help couples seeking marriage to understand marriage as expressed in the statement (see minute 97.31.12) including discussion of expressing their sexuality as a positive and joyous celebration, and encourage them to undertake marriage preparation programs where available;

97.31.10 to request congregations to encourage Uniting Church couples to take advantage of appropriate relationship enrichment and education programs;

97.31.11 to encourage synods, presbyteries, and congregations to identify suitable resources for individuals, couples and families for professional counselling and support, recognising the special needs of those who have experienced divorce or abuse;

97.31.12 to approve the following policy Statement on Marriage:

“The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia declares that

1. Marriage

Marriage for Christians is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life.

It is intended to be the mutually faithful lifelong union of a woman and man expressed in every part of their life together.

In marriage the man and the woman seek to encourage and enrich each other through love and companionship.

In the marriage service

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

Where sexual union takes place the partners seek to express mutual delight, pleasure and tenderness, thus strengthening the union of their lives together.

In marriage, children may be born and are to be brought up in love and security, thus providing a firm foundation for society.

2. Separation, Divorce and Re-marriage

- An inability to sustain the marriage relationship breaks the commitment to be together for life and may be painful for the couple, the children in their care, as well as for parents, friends and the Church community.
- In cases of the irretrievable breakdown of marriage, the Church acknowledges that divorce may be the only creative and life giving direction to take.
- The Church has a responsibility to:
 - (a) care for people, including children, through the trauma of the ending of a marriage;
 - (b) help people where appropriate to grieve, repent, grow in self-understanding, receive affirmation, grace and forgiveness;
 - (c) support them as they hear God's call for new life.
- The grace and healing of God are available to people who are divorced, which may free them to marry again.”

97.31.13 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;

97.31.14 to request the Standing Committee, following consultation with the Commission on Doctrine, to appoint a group representative of the different perspectives in the Uniting Church in Australia, to prepare and make available material on ways in which the Church understands and uses the Bible in seeking to live in faithfulness to the Gospel;

97.31.15 recognising with sadness its inability at this time to reach further agreement in regard to outstanding matters arising from the report *Uniting Sexuality and Faith* and recognising also the commitment of the Church to be both multicultural and inclusive, to

- (a) commit the Church to a continuing dialogue on the matters as yet unresolved in the same spirit of openness and compassion that has prevailed during the meeting of this Assembly;
- (b) acknowledge the disappointment of those who were looking to the Assembly for greater clarity and direction in regard to these matters;
- (c) express deep regret to those whose personal pain remains unalleviated by its inability to reach further decisions at this time;

- (d) convey to the UAICC the Assembly's commitment to remain in covenantal relationship and to continue in dialogue about these matters;
- (e) note the decisions of the Assembly Standing Committee expressed in resolutions 82.12, 87.46, 91.95.3(a), 92.31 and 94.78.3 and that these policies remain in place;
- (f) not proceed with the remaining proposals relating to sexuality except for proposal 51 (see minute 97.31.16); and
- (g) request former Presidents Ron Wilson, D'Arcy Wood and Jill Tabart to consider how the Assembly might deal with the outstanding issues relating to sexuality following this Assembly, and report with recommendations to the Standing Committee;

97.31.16 to discharge the Task Group on Sexuality with deep appreciation to all its members for their commitment to the journey over six years, for their prayerful and faithful determination to do their task properly, and for their willingness to struggle with the complex issues and diverse views of Church members in order to produce a report that could help the Church.

