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The 15th Assembly decision on marriage sparked many conversations across the Uniting Church. These papers have been written as a resource to those ongoing conversations.

3 What is it to be part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church?

Summary Sentence:

The apostolic faith teaches that Christ, who is Holy and Universal, makes us and all disciples one church, despite our shortcomings.

This is the classic phrase drawn from the ancient Nicene (or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan) Creed of 381CE. This is the Creed shared across the historic divisions within the universal church. It describes the key 'marks' or attributes of God's church. The *Basis of Union* explicitly commits the Uniting Church to live and work within the faith and unity of the church described with these words – in paragraphs 2, 14 (d) and 15 (a). The repetition of the phrase and the capitalisation of these words in both the 1971 and 1992 editions shows the importance of the concept.

How the church is to live and work within these marks is addressed in paragraph 3, which opens with these words: 'The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.'

The four 'marks' of the church are not given equal weighting in this rephrasing of the classic statement. Instead, the 'oneness' of the church reflects the One Lord. So, a church is

- **holy** – set apart by God and sanctified for a particular purpose,
- **catholic** – universal in scope,
- **apostolic** – in continuity with the teaching of the apostles,
- **one** – when, and only when, it is built upon the *one* Lord Jesus Christ.

The oneness or unity of the church does not consist in agreeing with other churches, even over important matters such as sacraments, church structure and authority or biblical interpretation. The unity is a gift of the One Lord and an eschatological trajectory or call for which Jesus prays (**John 17:21**). A church which is built on the one Lord Jesus Christ will 'preach Christ the risen crucified One and confess him as Lord to the glory of God the Father' (*Basis*, #3).

In other words, our common allegiance to Christ is what makes the various expressions of church across the world One.

Various parts of the church over history have declared other parts not sufficiently holy, catholic or apostolic, which has led to the fracturing of visible communion. But through the Holy Spirit we recognise our role is not to stand in judgement over other churches, but to contribute to the whole church being a fellowship of reconciliation (*Basis*, #3).

So, what is it to be part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church? A privilege and a call.

The biblical witness

Quotable Quote

Connections

Texts: Ephesians 4:1-13

Comment: Notice how in this passage, the theme of unity is not an abstract notion, but is defined by Christ and is made concrete by the community of the one church 'speaking the truth in love'.

We affirm that the apostolic faith of the Church is one, as the body of Christ is one. Yet there may legitimately be different formulations of the faith of the Church. The life of the Church as new life in Christ is one. Yet it is built up through different charismata and ministries. The hope of the Church is one. Yet it is expressed in different human expectations.

World Council of Churches, "Called to be One Church", #5 (2006)

Reflecting on all the above material, what do you hear and see which connects with your own journey of faith and that of your particular church community?

Acknowledgement:

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**Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY**