

Pastoral letter to the Glebe Rd Church Family

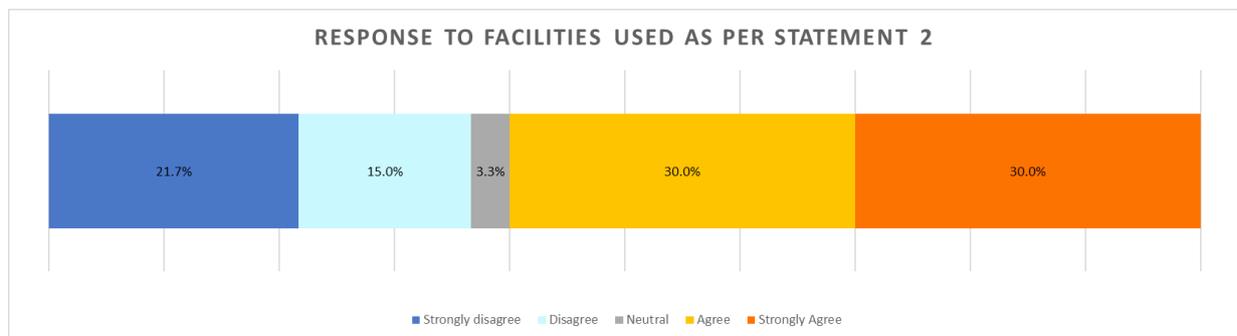
Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

As a Church Council (Elders), we recognise and appreciate the sincere way in which our congregation has considered the decision of the Uniting Church National Assembly to hold two equal and distinct statements of belief on marriage over the past few months, and the impact of that decision on the use of Glebe Road UC facilities.

At our Congregational Meeting on 23 September 2018, opportunity was provided for people to speak and also to submit a survey response, which sought to gauge individual feelings about the use of Glebe Road UC facilities for marriage services that affirm the National Assembly's second statement of belief on marriage (i.e. Marriage for the Christian is the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of two people to live together for life).

In total, 60 responses were received, and the results were:

- 60% agreed
- 36.7% disagreed
- 3.3% unsure



- Almost 40 people provided written comments.
- Responses indicating disagreement with the statement tended to emphasise scripture and often quoted and referenced Biblical passages. An emphasis was also given to the importance of the church in not conforming to the world. Several also commented on the need to be loving towards all people regardless of orientation.
- Responses indicating agreement with the statement tended to emphasise love, the sharing of God's grace, acceptance, and a reality that the world has moved on. Many also indicated a personal journey that has had an impact on their view of this issue.

In light of the feelings reflected in the survey (both in the basic agree/disagree response and also in the comments provided) **Church Council has determined to allow the use of Glebe Road UC facilities for marriage services that affirm the second statement on marriage.**

We recognise that for some this decision brings joy and affirmation, while for others it brings concern and uncertainty. We acknowledge both responses. The question of marriage as a sacred union is a serious one, and it is one that the

Church Council has considered earnestly. There are some key factors which have contributed to our decision.

Firstly, the majority of the responses from the congregation being in favour of our buildings being used indicated a general support for the issue, and for all couples being treated equally.

Secondly, there was a sense among the Elders that this may be a situation in which the Holy Spirit is revealing a fresh understanding to the church. The question of how marriage is defined has caused the whole Church (not just the UCA) to reflect on the very nature of our ecclesiology – what it means to *be* church. The Church Council feels that, if we are to be a welcoming and accepting community, and if we are to demonstrate God’s grace to the world, then our actions in how we respond to the needs of all people should be full of grace and the outpouring of God’s unconditional love.

Church Council recognises that this discussion has been confusing for some, in particular regarding the interpretation of certain passages of scripture. Our encouragement to the congregation is to consider whether the Holy Spirit’s leading may be providing a new revelation of those passages, in the same way the church no longer holds to a literal understanding of passages regarding slavery or the prohibition of women in leadership.

Thirdly, we acknowledge that through this process people in our congregation have shared personal stories about their own families and experiences, which demonstrated that for some among us, this is a closely-held issue with a very real impact on the ones they love. We affirm the courage of those people in sharing their experiences.

Indeed, we affirm the courage and honesty of everyone – on both sides of the discussion – for sharing openly and honestly during this process.

Please be assured that the same obligations and expectations will be placed on all couples seeking to be married in our buildings. That is, pre-marriage counselling will be required and the Minister in Placement will have the discretion to ensure they feel the couple are ready for marriage. This has always been the case, and it will continue to be so.

This is a significant step in the life of the Uniting Church collectively, and Glebe Road UC in particular. For Church Council, a serious factor in our decision making has been ensuring that through this season and into the future, our whole congregation can remain in unity with one another even when we individually may have differing understandings of the scripture and its interpretation for us today. We encourage you to continue to support and encourage one another; ask questions; be gracious and compassionate; and know that you are valued and loved by our community.

And so it is with faith in God’s unending love, and confidence in Glebe Road’s capacity to come together and love each other through every situation, that we offer to you our decision, along with our commitment that we will continue to serve our congregation with a complete reliance on the grace of Jesus Christ.

In love & faith,

Peter Case, Church Council Chairperson

On behalf of the Church Council