

## THE CHURCH'S VOICE

The Church as one of the institutions in society, along with other religious and secular organisations, is called to engage in a process of speaking into public discussions focussed on current political, economic, social and values issues. The Church engages in public expressions and opinions in order to contribute to decisions on these matters in order to contribute to the *common good*.

For too long, churches (and peoples of other faiths) have been silenced and sidelined in these public discussions by being told to “keep out of politics” and to “get back into your pulpits to preach”. In recent years, churches have been questioning this exclusion of our voices in the “public arena” and finding ways to “speak truth to power”.

Theologians also think, talk and write about public issues. However, this area of theology can become introverted and academic rather than connected with actions if they are not connecting and influencing what congregations say and do. The official councils of the Uniting Church in Australia make official statements and send out press releases to the media, but these are often ignored by decision-makers. So, the people of the Church (the voters) need to make their voices heard on these public issues, as Christians and people of faith.

The task before us is to discover, invent, identify what we and other faith groups can do as we address the issues facing people (individually, socially, nationally and internationally) in today's world, and express our ideas and learnings in the public arena in appropriate ways. As congregations of the Uniting Church we need to be guided by our policy decisions and statements, because we cannot speak “for the church”; we can speak “from the church” together with our designated leaders.

Engaging as a public voice means we need to listen to other voices in the various arenas, be well-informed about recent discoveries in the particular field, seek to hear “the voice of the Spirit” (theology) and join in discussion as **one more authentic voice** not professing to be the only voice that should be heard. In this process we also need to be theologically informed by the life and example of Jesus Christ. *What*

*would Jesus do or say?* is a good question to ask, along with “*What voices are not being heard?*”

The process of “**inductive learning**” or “**action/reflection**” can assist us to be an authentic voice. For example

1. Share **personal experiences** of the issue or concern (including the voices of those most affected);
2. Identify **common themes** emerging (analyse);
3. **Be informed** by our faith principles (theology), and by research findings in relation to this issue;
4. Discern **possible actions** we could take in response, and test each against possible consequences, in order to find the best possible action in this context;
5. Together **take action**;
6. Record the **observed outcomes** (both anticipated and surprising);
7. Identify **what we have learned**, so that we can be more effective in the future,

in a **cyclical process of dialogue and mutual learning**.

Engaging in being “a public voice” as a congregation is about being engaged in the community served by this group. It is part of being engaged in “God’s mission in the world”. It is not necessarily the same as offering practical services to the local community, though this engagement could (and perhaps should) lead to being a public voice, because this engagement has identified an injustice or injustices being experienced by a particular group in society, working against “the common good”!

Being a public voice also contributes to the process of bringing in “the reign of God”, of reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation”.