

To: The Amended Ecclesias in North America

On the advice of a number of brethren (not directly involved in the unity initiative in Ontario) we will be providing these bulletins periodically for information and context. We agree it is important that ecclesias are aware of any situation in the Brotherhood that could potentially affect them and would like to assist them in making well-informed assessments.

Distributed by: Representatives of the Amended Ecclesias signatory to the UA08

BRIEF HISTORY

Unions of separated portions of the One Body of Christ¹ took place in the U.K. and Australia some years ago, but division has continued in North America.

The current work towards unity in North America started in 1994. Over the course of nearly ten years, many respected brethren from both Amended (BASf) and Unamended (BUSf) ecclesias in several areas met with open Bibles and good, honest hearts to discuss and resolve² the historical differences and ongoing misunderstandings about what the others believed. The resulting document, the North American Statement of Understanding (NASU), dealt with the issues that have separated us for so many years, and established a common understanding of the doctrines of the “One Faith” as believed by Christadelphians for the last 160 years.

Over the past 4 years, progress has resulted in 12 Amended and 9 Unamended ecclesias accepting the Unity Agreement 2008 (UA08). An additional two Amended ecclesias recently affirmed the validity of the UA08 and welcomed all signatories, both Amended and Unamended, into fellowship. We are grateful to our Heavenly Father for these significant moves towards uniting the One Body of Christ.

Implementation of the UA08 has been focused on Ontario, and of the 29 Amended and UA08 ecclesias in Ontario, all but 5 continue to fellowship the Amended UA08 ecclesias³. The exception is a group of ecclesias that, in November 2008, promoted an alternative plan called the Proposal to Restore Unity (PtRU) after the UA08 had been implemented. These 5 ecclesias presently reject or are uncomfortable with fellowship with all UA08 signatory ecclesias. Several other ecclesias are still working through the process of study and decision-making. We accept that each ecclesia must work through these matters at their own pace, without pressure.

Being cognisant of the concerns and misapprehensions of some brethren, we wish to reassure our brethren that the

Amended Ecclesias signatory to the UA08 have in no way abandoned or devalued the BASf, as it is an integral part of the Agreement. On the contrary, we believe the NASU/UA08 strengthens the Statement of Faith’s opposition to wrong teaching on “Resurrectional Responsibility” and “Clean Flesh”, the very issues that once divided us.

We regret that the mistaken views of some have been exported to ecclesias outside of the area of this agreement, causing some to believe they should withhold fellowship from ecclesias associated with the UA08.⁴

DOCTRINE

We remain confident that all key doctrinal issues historically associated with the division have been adequately addressed in the NASU and UA08 documents. The expressions contained in these two documents are appropriate for true unity to exist among all who accept them. We feel we must stop clarifying and re-clarifying our definition of scriptural points. Our ecclesial members have made it clear they do not want to, nor feel it necessary to refine any further our expressions on the doctrines covered in NASU and UA08. In fact many are concerned that further statements actually risk disruption within the Amended community alone.

FELLOWSHIP BASIS

We recognize that, practically speaking, the unity process cannot extend indefinitely. We pray for the patience and understanding of any of those with concerns (about time frames) to see the greater good in affording the Unamended UA08 participants opportunity to continue to encourage other like-minded Unamended ecclesias who are still deciding their direction.

The clear declaration of support by the Unamended UA08 ecclesias for the doctrines set out in the NASU and UA08 has led to the withdrawal of fellowship from them by Unamended brethren who don’t support the NASU and/or UA08. These disfellowship actions effectively assist in clarifying the fellowship situation, and allow unity on a common, sound scriptural basis to prevail.⁵

CLOSED FELLOWSHIP

The notion of some, that the Unamended ecclesias of the UA08 practice “open fellowship” is neither helpful nor accurate. The lines of fellowship among most Unamended ecclesias have historically extended to include Amended ecclesias and have been “closed” beyond that.

In the current context, the Amended ecclesias of the UA08 extend fellowship only to those Unamended ecclesias that accept the UA08. For their part, the UA08 Unamended ecclesias are reaching out in good faith to extend unity to other like-minded Unamended ecclesias on the understanding they outlined in the 4 points overleaf.

¹ Eph 4:1-6

² Col 3:12-15

³ Matt 5:9; 1 Cor 1:10-13; Gal 5:13-15; Jas 5:7-9

⁴ Prov 26:20-22

⁵ Eph 4:11-16; John 17:21-23; 1 Cor 1:10-13; Phil 1:1-10; 1 John 2:8-11

The following is taken from the UA08 Website, UA08.com under the tab entitled "UA08 in Practice". We feel this is an appropriate, measured approach based on trust and good faith

in our Unamended brethren. They too struggle in the difficult implementation stages of unity within the Unamended community in much the same way as we do in ours.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE UNAMENDED SIGNATORIES OF THE UA08

We accept the Unamended ecclesias that have accepted the UA08 and are confident that their ecclesias do not believe or teach any of the doctrines historically associated with the division. We trust their word (repeated in their letter of April 21, 2006) that they will not allow such doctrines to be taught in their ecclesias. Our Unamended partners have explained their position on fellowship (below):

1. Our ecclesias accept the whole UA08, including the announcement, which we have posted in accordance with the UA08 (page iii) as prescribed by the agreement. We intend to continue posting it for the foreseeable future as a measure of continued good faith.
2. As signatories to the UA08, we are committed to seeking out, extending, and enhancing the unity of, and with, the Amended ecclesias who are also signatories to this agreement. In the spirit of the unity agreement, we will with due care be sensitive to the needs and well-being of these other signatory ecclesias, and all ecclesias, especially during its critical and challenging implementation.
3. Our ecclesias view loving fellowship among fellow believers as a matter of scriptural directive (John 13:34-35, 14:21-24, 15:12-14, 1 John 1:3) and many members believe that refusing fellowship to brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ could be an offence against Christ himself. (Mark 3:33-35, Matt. 25:40, 45, Rom 14:1-4, 10-13, 23, Rom 15:7, Jas 4:17; also Prov.17:15)
4. A number of ecclesias have declared their rejection of NASU and of our ecclesias due to our support for NASU, finding the expressions on doctrinal issues fundamentally unacceptable. Accordingly, we are no longer in fellowship with these ecclesias. We continue to consider members of other Unamended ecclesias to be in fellowship with us, provided they do not declare their rejection of our ecclesial position. We believe we have spiritual obligations to them as our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. Thus, we will engage in a process to encourage these ecclesias to participate fully in unity. This is similar to the concerns and approach of our counterpart Amended ecclesias regarding other Amended brethren not part of the UA08. Should these withdrawing ecclesias seek fellowship with us at some future point, we would continue to view them as out of fellowship, thus requiring comprehensive discussions with them to satisfy ourselves that we are indeed walking together on a sound common scriptural basis.

Although we don't have the same knowledge of the broader Unamended community as our partners do, and have not accepted them in fellowship, we respect the views of our partners and trust them to work with their Unamended brethren and honour the spirit and intent of the agreement and their explanations to us (above).

Further Bulletins will be issued periodically to continue to update and inform the Brotherhood, consistent with the operating principles of the UA08 Agreement specifically as follows:

- We respect and practice ecclesially-based fellowship.
- We honour the important principle of ecclesial autonomy, balanced in measure with due care and concern for the broader community.