

Worship Resources for Reconciliation Sunday 26 May 2013

Dear colleagues in Ministry

It was agreed that the Presbytery establish Reconciliation Sunday in Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June) annually, to be celebrated across the Church, and request Church Councils to include this day in their worship calendars.

This year **Reconciliation Sunday** falls on **26 May** which is **Trinity Sunday**. It is significant that this is also **Sorry Day**.

We have prepared these resources with the three themes in mind to encourage congregations to celebrate all three events together.

This is the seventh year that we have prepared worship resources for use on Reconciliation Sunday. Some of the resources we produced in previous years have been used to produce this resource, particularly those from 2010 when Reconciliation Sunday also fell on Trinity Sunday. Please refer to these resources for additional information. They may be downloaded from the Mission Resourcing SA Website. Go to the link here: <http://sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/reconciliation-sunday>

Please feel free to use all or part of these resources in planning worship.

The resources include:

1. A complete order of service
2. Suggested hymns and a children's address (separate downloads)
3. Some material for consideration when sermon writing
4. General information on the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and Covenanting (separate download)
5. Other Resources for Parents and Playgroups

Dr Marelle Harisun	Co-chair, Covenanting Committee
Denise Champion	Co-chair, Covenanting Committee, Covenanting Coordinator
Peter Russell	Secretary, Covenanting Committee
Rev Phil Hoffman	Member, Covenanting Committee
Dr Rosemary Dewerse	Uniting College & Member, Covenanting Committee
Dr Di Russell	Covenanter

Order of Service for 26 May 2013 Trinity Sunday

Preliminaries:

If weather and architecture permit, the congregation might gather outside the church and use the first hymn as a processional hymn.

As the people gather, the sound of the didgeridoo* is heard, calling the people to worship.

The Christ candle (red) is lit on the communion table. It should be surrounded by half a dozen smaller candles, either black and white, or black, red, gold, blue, green and white, representing Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people (these smaller candles to be lit later).

If available a coolamon or piti (an Aboriginal wooden bowl) may be placed on the communion table and used for the collection. Members of the congregation may be asked the Sunday before to bring any appropriate Aboriginal artefacts such as bowls, carved animals and clap sticks to be placed on the table.

** If a local didgeridoo player is available, he might be invited to play. A fee would no doubt be payable. Otherwise there are good didgeridoo recordings available. Narana Creations stocks them. Narana (410 Torquay Road, Grovedale, Vic 3216. Fax: 03 5241 5711. Tel: 03 5241 5700) recommends the following CD **Didgeridoo – Norm Stanley \$29.95 + \$5 postage & packing**. Narana is run by the Congress in Victoria so purchasing from this organisation supports Aboriginal employment. If it is too late to get it this year, order it anyway for use next year or for other special occasions.*

Introduction to Worship:

The worship leader will indicate the special theme of the worship for the day, picking up the theme of reconciliation. Reconciliation begins in the immense love of God, who has continually reached out to reconcile the whole creation to God. That love invites a response from all of us towards God and towards all people, including those from whom we are alienated.

Today is Trinity Sunday.

Today we also recognise Reconciliation Sunday and acknowledge that this is Sorry Day. The Uniting Church and the Synod of South Australia is on a journey of reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.

We believe the Trinity evokes the theme of community and relationships and that restoring human relationships is part of God's reconciling mission in our world.

Through forgiveness, God's grace works to provide all with hope and a new way of living.

This journey of reconciliation is a response to the Bible's call to care for all people including the marginalised and vulnerable.

Greeting:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all;
And also with you.

Call to worship (a responsive reading based on the Lord's Prayer):

Eternal Spirit, source of all that is and ever shall be,
Loving Parent in whom we discern heaven,

May knowledge of your holiness inspire all peoples,
and may your commonwealth of peace and freedom flourish on earth.

May all of humankind heed your call to justice and compassion.
May we find the bread that we need for today.

And for the hurts we cause one another
May we be forgiven in the same measure that we forgive.

In times of trial and temptation, help us to be strong.
When life seems overwhelming, help us to endure;

and thus from the yoke of sin deliver us.
May you reign in the power of human love,

now and forever.
Amen.

(THall)

Welcome to Country:

If a local Aboriginal elder is available, he/she might welcome people to country.

In any case, the worship leader welcomes people to the service, indicating the special nature of the service, and either thanks the Aboriginal elder for the welcome to country,

or

simply draws the attention of the congregation to the fact that we are meeting on land which has been cared for from time immemorial by the (name of the local Aboriginal people) people, as stewards of the Creation. One of the following may be used.

I/we acknowledge that we are on the land of the _____ people. I/we pay respect to their tribal Elders, honour their continuing culture, and pray that we might all work together for reconciliation in this nation.

or

I/we acknowledge the traditional owners that God placed as the original custodians of the country on which we meet. I/we pay respect to their tribal Elders, honour their continuing culture, and pray that in the power of your Spirit we might all work together for reconciliation and justice in this nation.

(Use the second example unless you can identify the traditional owners of the area)

Hymn:

A selection of hymns and songs is available as a separate download. They have been brought together to assist in selection. Several of them are particularly suited to Trinity Sunday. All suit the theme of reconciliation. The choice is up to those planning this service.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession:

The work of the creator is visible.

Let us respond with praise.

The example of Jesus is apparent.

Let us respond with obedience.

The wind of the spirit is blowing.

Let us respond with joy.

The word of god is calling.

Let us worship in spirit and in truth.

O Trinity of love, One God, community for which we yearn,
look now on us – who look on you

And hear our prayer for our community:

Where there is falseness,

reveal it by your truth.

Where there is any coldness,

kindle the flame of your love.

Where there is sorrow,

let there be grief that is good.

Where there is joy and hope,

free us to share it together.

And make us one,

as you are one.

Before God and you who are near me,

I release anything I hold against you;

I regret all I have done to harm you;

I stand beside the wrong in my life

and ask for God's forgiveness.

Before God and you who are near,

We release anything we hold against one another;

We regret all the harm we have done;

We stand beside the wrong in our lives

and ask for your forgiveness.

(silence)

Jesus says to us, each one:

“Go and sin no more,

come and follow me”.

Now bind our hands with honesty

as we offer them to each other

and our prayer to you.

Iona Community - from Terry C Falla (ed) Be Our freedom Lord: Responsive prayers for contemporary worship (2nd edition) Open Book 1994, pages 29, 144/5

Children's Address: *The Whale Story*

The Whale Story (see 2 separate downloads – narrated Powerpoint and story notes) or one of the narrated stories from previous years may be downloaded and used.

Hymn:

Scripture readings:

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8 (*We suggest you use this contemporary version*)

Holy Friend, God our True God,
how awesome is your name in all the world!
Your glory is greater than a billion stars
yet you enjoy the songs of infants and children.
Their praise is a stronghold against foes
and their joy silences the vengeful enemy.
When I look at the skies, the work of your little finger,
the moon and the stars which you have destined,
what are human beings that you think of us,
mere earthlings that you care for us?
Yet you have made us little less than gods
and have covered us with glory and beauty.
You have put us in charge of your handiwork,
placing all under our stewardship;
The sheep, cattle and creatures of the bush,
the birds of the air, plains and billabong,
the fish and dolphins that live in our seas,
and whales that make paths through the ocean.
Holy Friend, God our True God,
how awesome is your name in all the world!

© Bruce Prewer 2000 (Another version is in "Australian Psalms") used with permission

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Witness: See the sermon ideas at the beginning of "Other Resources" below

Hymn:

Intercessory Prayers:

Eternal and ever loving God
we believe that our worship draws us near to you, and towards our neighbours on earth.

We pray for the whole creation:

May we all learn before it is too late
to respect the uniqueness, fragility, and beauty of our earth and all its creatures.

We pray for every nation and race, especially for the Aboriginal / first peoples of this land:

May our actions and our lifestyle bear out our belief
that all people everywhere are our sisters and brothers,
whatever their country, their city, or their tribe,
whatever their education or their culture,
whatever their circumstances, religion, or colour.

We pray for peace in our torn and troubled world and for a country that discriminates and marginalises Aboriginal people:

We pray that weapons and prejudice may be discarded instead of people, guns silenced instead of the voices of the poor, and that in a world half expecting terrorist attack, we might learn that love is not a luxury.

We pray for the church of Jesus Christ:

May it be true and joyful, wholesome and active, always rediscovering that you called it into being for the service and salvation of others.

We pray for the witness of our church community:

As we grow in faith, love and hope, help us to understand that no planning for the future, however necessary, no program, no matter how carefully conceived, can relieve us of the necessity of going forward into a future that cannot be planned -- of risk, of danger, of hope in your incalculable grace.

We pray for ourselves:

Not one of us has ever found or given enough tenderness or love in his or her life, enough truth, freedom, beauty, goodness, and joy. We are always travelling to a new tomorrow.

Lord we pray for our world, we pray for others, we pray for ourselves.

We pray because you have put within us an unquenchable hope.

We pray because we live for the ultimate.

We pray because Jesus is our Lord and your kingdom is in our midst.

Amen

Adapted with minor changes from Terry C Falla (ed) Be Our freedom Lord: Responsive prayers for contemporary worship (2nd edition) Open Book1994, page 187

The Offering

Please consider using the offering or a special retiring offering today (or an appeal run over several weeks) for the work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in its ministry to Aboriginal people. See separate UAICC Appeal Information download – Pilgrimage of Healing 2013 – for details of this years' project and where/how to forward proceeds raised.

Prayer of Dedication:

Let us pray:

We confess that what has happened in the past in this nation has not always been done in accordance with the hopes and possibilities that God had for us.

We confess our hardness of heart and lack of compassion. Cleanse us from the racism that lurks in the dark corners of our souls.

We pray for healing, forgiveness and restoration for all peoples who call Australia home.

We resolve that by the grace of God we shall strive to make good as much as we are able and to live differently so that our Aboriginal brothers and sisters may share equally with us in the bounty of this land.

We pray that we will support in any way we can the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, its ministers, elders and congregations as they minister to the spiritual, social, mental and emotional well being of Aboriginal Australians.

Bless and use these gifts and through the power of your Spirit move us to acts of true reconciliation and change us so that we might make a difference.

Amen.

(Adapted from the liturgy provided to the churches in 2008 following the Prime Minister's apology to the Stolen Generations)

Hymn:

Words of Mission:

May the God who dances in creation,
who embraces us with human love,
who shakes our lives like thunder,
bless us and drive us out with power
to fill the world with justice
and with peace.

Janet Morley - from Terry C Falla (ed) Be Our freedom Lord: Responsive prayers for contemporary worship (2nd edition) Open Book 1994, page 236

For Children, Parents & Playgroups for Reconciliation Week

At Home or Church

Reconciliation Week is a time to build mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians. Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of Indigenous history and culture, changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings, and encouraging action. 1yr+ Help children to trace around other children's hands with crayon or texta onto a large sheet of paper or multiple sheets stuck together. The children colour the pairs of hands different colours: brown, black, pink and yellow. Talk about God's love for all people no matter what their appearance or colour.

Out and About

3yr+ Visit a local site of Aboriginal significance or a cultural centre. Explore the local Council library for some picture books with Aboriginal themes for reading to young children. Ask the librarian for suggestions.

Other resources

Some sermon ideas

These few verses in John 16 find their place as part of the Gospel's long account of the time of Jesus spent with his disciples at his moment of farewell and impending death [John chapters 14 – 17]. Often titled "Jesus' Farewell Discourse", they are an extended teaching giving encouragement to Jesus' immediate followers and preparing them for the coming time when he will no longer share their lives and ministry.

As part of the words of the Gospel here, the disciples are no longer slaves or servants of the Master, but 'friends' [John 15:15]. We are later reminded that those whom Christ befriends are given the specific task of 'making others his friends also' [2 Corinthians 5:18, 19]. In other words, this describes the work of reconciliation, a chief demand and call of following Christ.

Specifically verses 12 – 15 of John's sixteenth chapter (16) record the promise of the giving of God's Spirit to Jesus' followers. The Spirit, the paraclete [from *para*: 'alongside' and *kletos*: 'called', i.e. literally 'the one called alongside'] is to be their advocate, their comforter and guide.

Gail R O'Day comments in "The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary":

"The functions of the Paraclete spelled out in these verses will ensure that the disciples do not face the future alone" [page 773]. O'Day continues describing the three functions of the Holy Spirit in John chapter 16:

- (i) In the future the Paraclete will lead the community into the life-giving revelation of God in Jesus.
- (ii) The Paraclete will proclaim the teachings of Jesus to them (the disciples) in the new and changing circumstances of their lives.
- (iii) The Paraclete gives the work of Jesus a continuing sense after his coming death [pages 773 – 775].

The giving of the Holy Spirit in the context of the close of Jesus' time amongst his disciples is summarized in verse 13 of this passage which bears the promise that the Spirit will "lead you (the disciples) into all truth". The Spirit both accompanies the disciples in bonding them in unity in the shared mission of Christ and guarantees their understanding of the words Jesus has spoken in new and changing circumstances.

There is a question here for preacher's to grapple with about the Spirit's nature and function: Is the Spirit of God to be known for who the Spirit is, or by what the Spirit does?

It is the presence and activity of the Spirit that ensures that Jesus' words are not "locked in the disciples past, restricted to a particular historic moment [O'Day, page 773-74]." They are given new life and continuing meaning. It is, therefore, the presence and activity of the Spirit who 'unlocks time'.

We could well ask in response to these events of Jesus' departure: Is this a new moment in human relations with the divine? Was there ever a time when the Spirit wasn't? Is this the Spirit given afresh or in a new way? Are God's actions in Christ timeless?

We find this understanding 'read backwards' in the Psalm 8: the Spirit is the Spirit which was in creation. Timelessness extends to the far reaches of what has gone as well as to the extent of all that will be. Psalm 8 celebrates God in creation and places humanity at the centre of God's mind, amid the moon and stars, the subject of God's glories.

The preacher might ask: Which humanity? Does this give scope for inclusion of all, and therefore, issue a call for reconciliation?

Similarly, the Proverbs reading gives wisdom a female voice, and, in her praises, notes that she (wisdom) was "created at the beginnings of the Lord's work ... at the first, before the beginnings of the earth" [verses 22, 23]. As one of the faces of God, Wisdom, too, is beyond the bounds of time.

Our Indigenous Australian sisters and brothers know this well. Aboriginal spirituality connects past, present and future. Aboriginal people have always understood God's actions as being timeless. They sought to have this captured in the words of the new preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church [adopted by the 13th Triennial Assembly in Adelaide in July 2012] which recognized that:

- 1. When the churches that formed the Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonization they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.
and*
- 2. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers. The Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's way.*

Even before the alien tall ships arrived on the shores of their homeland, Australia's First Peoples had a share in the 'Spirit who leads into all truth'. It was important for Aboriginal Australians to say this and have the rest of their fellow Australians understand it.

As we think about The Preamble, we get a glimpse of and a rare opportunity to engage in a conversation about Aboriginal Spirituality, wisdom and understanding. We can try to see the perspective from which Aboriginal People understand dreaming stories.

Most Aboriginal people think in a different cultural context. For example, Aboriginal Dreaming stories are creation stories that tell about the then (a time long ago), the here and now, and the future; they interpret a world view that is quite different from that of people brought up in a Western culture. The Preamble recognises that the work of the Spirit gave Aboriginal people 'particular insights into God's way'. This can be seen in the Dreaming story included as part of these resources.

A wise church leader once told me, "...whatever the Holy Spirit says to the church must be consistent with the teaching of Jesus and the God we understand that the Spirit speaks of." John's Gospel bears a similar reminder: such revelations need to be consistent with both the life and ministry of Jesus and the knowledge of the God he came to make known. Jesus is the guard rail within which the Spirit steers faith. This is another beauty of the concept of Trinity.

Avenues for preachers to pursue:

- ❖ Explore the timelessness of God and the on-going promise of God's presence (including what this means / has meant for our First Peoples as we contemplate the Spirit's work of reconciliation)
- ❖ There may be a three-point sermon here describing the three functions of the Holy Spirit in the John 16 reading [after O'Day].
- ❖ Pick up on Psalm 8 and the significant place humanity is given in God's creation. Develop this in thinking of: Which humanity? Or which parts of humanity? See also "The Whale Story" resource.
- ❖ If the Spirit acts in 'leading into all truth', what does this say about the Spirit in relation to reconciliation? Discuss reconciliation as a living, active 'truth' of God.
- ❖ Explore the relational nature of the Christian Trinity, the concept of God as Community in which "the nature of God is closer to a loving community than to a lofty individuality" and where the "highest form of existence, of personal being, is communal" (see Bruce Prewer <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocC/C37trin.htm> Sermon 1 Adventures in Community). The importance of community is something our Aboriginal sisters and brothers understand very well.

'Father, you gave us the Dreaming...' Aboriginal Theology and the Future'

by

Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarrat

in

From Here to Where? Australian Christians owning the past – embracing the future, 1988
edited by Rev Dr Andrew Dutney, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne.

EXCERPTS FROM THIS ARTICLE

In the world in which we live, there are many tribes, cultures and traditions of people. Each one of us expresses the definition and terminology of dreaming in many different ways... To me as a tribal Aboriginal...dreaming is reality, because it takes in all the Aboriginal spirituality. When the religious tribal elders say, 'This mountain is my dreaming' or 'that land is my dreaming', they are really saying to us that this mountain or that land hold very sacred knowledge, wisdom and moral teaching, passed on to us by the spirit of the creator, who has created for us the holy sacred sites and the sacred mountains which exist today.

Therefore the Aboriginal dreaming is based on three fundamental areas in Aboriginal life systems. They are religious, social and political. One cannot be divided from the other, because if it is destroyed or interrupted, it takes away the uniqueness of what was designed and entrusted to us by our creator spirit.

Australian Aborigines are spiritual people... Aboriginal people practise their religious life in such ways to love, respect and honour their creator in whom they believe, just as the Hebrews practised their religious life to love, respect and honour their god, Yahweh. Discipline, self-respect, pride and dignity are part of the religious behaviour of Aboriginal people... All that is expressed in the religious manner is practised in the social life-cycle of the Aboriginal people.

Is the God of the Bible active in Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal dreamtime? This is the question that is asked by the Christian churches today. Aboriginal Christians are convinced and believe that the God of the Bible was with us and our people in the dreamtime. He was very active in our history. He has come to us in many different ways and many different

forms to reveal his presence. He spoke to us through his creation, the beauty of the nature that clothes itself in God's glory that convinced us and made us believe that he is also the God of the Aboriginal race in Australia.

Our Aboriginality is God's gift to us as a people, of which we are very proud... He spoke to my people in history in our traditional language so that they understood and related to him... We believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of our forefathers.

In him we have survived and maintained our true Aboriginal spirituality through our religious ceremonies and social life. We are prepared to throw away any wrong interpretation of the creator spirit which the Holy Spirit now reveals to us.

[I have previously written*] *some missionaries came and saw the totems of Aboriginal people and jumped to the wrong conclusions. Encountering unfamiliar art forms of a sophisticated kind, some early missionaries wrongly decided they must be idols. Theologians are today quite clear that... 'totems' are not idols as the Bible defines them...totems and sacred sites serve to retain the law in a way analogous to that of the ark of the covenant... Israel did not worship the ark. It was not an idol; rather it was a sacred object placed in a sacred place to remind Israel of the Law and of the mighty deeds of Yahweh in history.*

There have been two hundred years of contact in this country. We cannot only celebrate the settlers and those who have been born and lived in this country as Australian citizens since 1788. It is time to listen to Aboriginal people. It is time to appreciate our spirituality, to hear our cries and see our oppression, and to share in it. It is time to respect and honour our spirituality completely and without reservation – just as we are willing to respect your roots.

We, the Aboriginal people, are a gift to the land and to the people who come here. You who have come here these last 200 years are also a gift to us. Justice, honesty and genuine reconciliation is the result when we have respect and honour for one another.

God is seeking Australian leaders, whether white or black, who have a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit who will lead our nation to the kind of unity which is built on justice and love.

*In the book *Human Rights, a Dialogue between the first and third worlds*, 1983, edited by Robert A Evans and Alice F Evans, Orbis Books, New York.

†*The Reverend Dr Djiniyini Gondarra OAM was born in Milingimbi in West Arnhem Land in 1945. He is a Yolŋu man, senior elder and Indigenous rights advocate from East Arnhem Land. He is a Uniting Church minister and a past Moderator of the Northern Synod.*

Uniting Church in Australia - 12th Assembly, July 2009

The Uniting Church is the first church in Australia to constitutionally acknowledge Aboriginal and Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia Uniting Church President Rev. Alistair Macrae says the change to the preamble signifies the natural and rightful extension of the covenantal relationship that the Uniting Church has with the Indigenous people of the church, and by extension of this land.

The Chairperson for the UAICC Rev. Ken Sumner said, "For members of the Congress, this acknowledgement places the foundation of our relationship in truth. It also, perhaps for the first time, makes Aboriginal and Islander people feel included in this church. For the first time, our covenantal relationship is founded on truth and not the lingering denial of our

historical past. This is our story. The way the Congress has experienced our relationship is now enshrined in the introduction to the law of the church of which we are all a part."

The preamble to the Uniting Church constitution was passed by the 12th Assembly in 2009 and subsequently passed by the Synods and Presbyteries (the Church's state-based and regional councils) throughout 2010, as is required for constitutional change.

Revisions to the text have been developed after extensive consultation throughout the church and in particular with the UAICC and Indigenous Uniting Church members.

REVISED PREAMBLE TO CONSTITUTION

Twelfth Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia

The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on 22 June, 1977 by the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia after the approval of "The Basis of Union" by the Councils and Courts of those three churches, guided by the belief that they had been called by God into this union.

The Church in accordance with the Basis of Union accepts that the responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them and so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally, government is entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing gifts and graces, with which God has endowed them for the building up of God's Church and that therefore the Church shall be governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation to the Church and the world.

The Church in accordance with the Basis of Union acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law, the aim of which is to confess God's will for the life of Christ's Church.

As the Church believes God guided it into union so it believes that God is calling it to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many land, and as part of that to

RECOGNISE THAT

1. When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.
2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.
3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.
4. Some members of the uniting churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their well being, culture

and language as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.

5. Many in the uniting churches, however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.
6. The uniting churches were largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and inter-relationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.
7. From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.
8. In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.
9. In 1988 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God.
10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

AND THUS the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

1. Amend the Constitution by adding the following definitions to Clause 3

Covenantal relationship is the relationship which exists between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Assembly, which began in the invitation of 1988 and response of 1994, in which both groups commit themselves to developing more just, inclusive and equal relationships in the Church that recognise the place of First Peoples, the difficult history of this nation since invasion, and the particular responsibility of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress for ministry with and among Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

First Peoples are the Aboriginal and Islander peoples of Australia who are the indigenous peoples of this land. These peoples are a diverse group with many languages and communal identities.

Second Peoples are all those peoples who have come after the First Peoples and who are beneficiaries in some way of the invasion and dispossession of the lands of the First Peoples. Among Second Peoples within the Church are many whose racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, experiences and expression of Christian faith are not those originating in Western forms of thought and theological expression.

Recognition of Aboriginal people in the SA Constitution

Extracts from a transcript of the report of the event by *SBS World News Australia Radio*
<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1750342/Indigenous-recognition-in-SA-constitution>

South Australia has formally recognised Aboriginal people in the state's constitution. Parliament has passed a Bill recognising past injustices and acknowledging Indigenous citizens as the first owners and occupiers of the state. And with that, 175 years of not acknowledging Indigenous citizens was reversed. They're now formally recognised in the South Australian constitution as the original owners of the land.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Ian Hunter says it's a big step forward for reconciliation, fixing glaring omissions in the state's founding document. "It makes no mention of the Aboriginal occupation of the lands and the waters that were proclaimed, nor of the relationship of Aboriginal people with those lands and those waters. New and respectful words can help to address those omissions. And while perhaps injustices cannot be undone, they can at least be acknowledged."

The wording of the constitutional change was devised by a panel of prominent Indigenous leaders and experts. It contains an important caveat that the changes have no legal effect. It means the constitutional recognition cannot be used to sue for compensation for past injustices, nor to further future claims for land.

It also acknowledges the existence of a decree unique in Australia, called the Letters Patent. The Letters Patent was an order by King William the fourth issued in 1836, declaring that Aboriginal people should not be deprived of occupation or enjoyment of their lands by settlers. The Letters Patent has never been honoured, but there's a groundswell of pressure for its principles to be adopted, even if it's impractical to entirely return alienated lands.

Opposition MP Terry Stephens says the Letters Patent is an example of good intentions unfulfilled, and diligence is needed to ensure the same fate doesn't befall the state constitution. "There is no doubt that these conditions and hardships with which Aboriginal people live in this state have been born out of white settlement. But it's not good enough to say this, say sorry for wrongdoing and leave it at that. The point of which is that official documents can say one thing, but what happens in practice is what really matters and is what truly affects people."

The challenge faced by South Australia to ensure the change is more than just symbolic is also facing the nation, as it moves towards constitutional recognition. South Australia's acknowledgement adds impetus to the push for Indigenous recognition in the national constitution. By joining New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland in recognising Indigenous citizens, Minister Hunter says South Australia has avoided humiliation. Unlike the state constitution which can be amended by Parliament, the federal constitution requires a referendum to achieve change.

But some have criticised the change as tokenistic, doing little to address the disadvantage that's arisen from past injustices. The Bill's passage was briefly disrupted by a protestor calling for historical rights granted to Aboriginal people to be honoured.

Dignity for Disability MP Kelly Vincent says well-meaning words are inadequate unless they're backed by positive action. However she says recent government policy decisions have shamefully stripped Aboriginal people of rights and she fears that will continue unabated, even as the government cloaks itself in credit for its constitutional achievement.

Social Justice campaigner Tauto Sansbury drafted independent MP John Darley to read his statement to the parliament, thus ensuring his views were captured in Hansard.

"While the proposed Act may be well-intentioned, it creates a dangerous sleight-of-hand scenario. It creates the impression of a tangible benefit to Aboriginal people, while in practical terms their position is not materially advanced. The feel-good emotions it is calculated to create in the wider community tend to mask the real plight that Aboriginal people experience in society. The issues of poverty, poor education, health, housing and over-representation in the criminal justice system are matters to be addressed prior to the window-dressing of an amendment to the South Australian constitution."

Premier Jay Weatherill acknowledged there are differing views about the appropriateness of the change, but thinks it enjoys broad support. "The overwhelming majority of South Australians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, think this is an important step to acknowledge in very truthful terms the importance of the Aboriginal people to this state and their historical relationship to the country, and the importance of the continuing Aboriginal culture for South Australia. So this is an overwhelmingly positive and supported measure by the South Australian community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal; it doesn't mean it's supported by every single person in the state though."

Greens MP Tammy Franks says racism remains a significant problem that the constitutional recognition won't immediately eliminate, but it is a move in that direction. She says although the change is largely a symbolic gesture, history shows symbols are important and often powerful contributors to change.

"And indeed let us not forget the more recent history where the peoples of over 40 nations within the mapped boundaries of this state, and indeed the several hundred nations across the continent of this island, were treated as invisible, as sub-human and as somehow lesser. Let us remember there was a past where policies and practices sought to assimilate and eradicate the very existence of the first peoples. Where those who invaded or settled were guilty of murder, of rape, of poisoning, of stealing, of paternalising and more recently I believe patronising. Let us pledge as a Parliament today we will never repeat these crimes against humanity, or should we see them, we will never stay silent if they are witnessed by us."

For additional prayers and readings see previous sets of resources

<http://sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/reconciliation-sunday>

Acknowledgements

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The Covenanting Website of the Uniting Church SA

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NATSIEC Website

<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/natsiec/resources/theology>

Week of Prayer for Reconciliation

<http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/natsiec/resources/prayer>

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