

Worship Resources for Reconciliation Sunday

May 31, 2009

(updated)

In 2006 the Presbytery established Reconciliation Sunday as a time of celebration in the Uniting Church in South Australia and requested Church Councils to include this day in their worship calendars. It is celebrated on the first Sunday during Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June).

This is the third year that we have prepared worship resources for use on Reconciliation Sunday. The resources we produced for 2007 and 2008 may also be useful.

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

At least some part of the service on this day should pay respect to this event in the life of the church and to the work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

An alternative Sunday for celebrating this event could be one of the Sundays during the NAIDOC week celebrations, 5 – 12 July, 2009 if this fits in better with your worship planning.

The resources include:

1. A complete order of service
2. Some material for consideration when sermon writing
3. General information on the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and Covenanting
4. Other Resources & References

Marelle Harisun,	Chairperson, Covenanting Committee
Andrew Clarke,	Secretary, Covenanting Committee
Peter Russell,	Covenanting Coordinator

Order of Service for May 31, 2009

Pentecost 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 (410 Torquay Road, Grovedale, Vic 3216. Fax: 03 5241 5711. Tel: 03 5241 5700). Narana 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 on 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.

Greeting:

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

And also with you.

Call to worship:

God of Love, we come to worship you. You are the Creator of this land and of all good things. Our hope is in you because you gave your Son Jesus to reconcile the world to you. We pray for your strength and grace to forgive, accept and love one another, as you love us and forgive and accept us in the sacrifice of your Son and the power of your Spirit. **Amen.**

(adapted from material by Wontulp Bi-Buya Indigenous Theology Working Group)

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 in the power of your Spirit we might all work together for reconciliation and justice 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: They that believe

AHB 405 TiS 479

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Leader:

God of Australia, you have loved this ancient land long before the human eye explored it.

You loved and spoke to its Indigenous people long before the first Europeans arrived.

First Reader:

We bring you our gratitude
for the diversity and wealth
of this land and its people:
for its weathered old mountains, fertile valleys,
and vast plains;
for its riches of mine and agriculture,
forest and grazing lands;
for the first Australians, who know and love this continent
with an intimate, profound sensitivity;
for the courage, vision and sacrifice of the early settlers;

for the diverse races that now call Australia home:

Congregation:

For these and all your gifts

We offer you, O Lord, our joyful, thankful hearts.

Second Reader:

We also bring confession

of the evil

which has marred our country

and injured our citizens:

for the rapacious ways we have exploited the good earth

for quick monetary gain, with little thought for the future:

for the ugliness we have imposed on places of rare beauty

through our vandalism – both legal and illegal;

for our history of vile inhumanity

towards our Indigenous sisters and brothers,

and for the injustices which they still suffer;

for our neglect of basic health care and our continuing

racist intolerance towards Aboriginal people

for our blatant selfishness which has helped

create and maintain the caste of the unemployed

Congregation:

Have mercy on us, O God,

bring us to repentance.

Forgive and renew us

with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Children's Address

see References for notes on the Thukeri Story narrated by Uncle Ken – download the powerpoint file and the activity sheet and notes from the website –

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

Hymn: Filled with the Spirit's Power

AHB 328 TiS 411

Scripture readings:

Acts 2:1-21

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Witness: *For ideas and notes for the sermon see the Other Resources below*

Hymn: Creator God, you made every race

May be sung to the tune: Living Lord, AHB 451 TiS 526

Creator God, you made every race
giving each your law,
good and true.

We are to worship you, O God,
care for creation in your name,
love and forgive as you love us,
Holy God.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have made us one,
binding each to you,
making peace;
healing the wounds our hands have made;
asking for truth and grace to rule,
justice, respect and loyalty,
Covenant Lord.

Spirit of Christ, present from all time,
guiding, shedding light,
giving life;
Counsellor, make us strong to fight,
Free as the wind to do the right,
ready to follow all the way
yet untrod.

One God in three, bonded strong in love,
reaching out to all,
giving God!
Build in this land community -
black, white and brown, one family-
serving the world your love has made,
God of grace.

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with these words attached.*

To be sung to the tune "Living Lord", AHB 451; TiS #526

Intercessory Prayers:

Holy Spirit you make all things new;
Renew us in will and deed
To work together with you.

Loving Creator, we pray for our wide island continent:
its forests, deserts, rivers, billabongs and mountains,
its coastlands, lakes islands and seas, its unique marsupials and birds,
its reptiles, fish, coral reefs, dugongs, turtles and great whales.

Loving Parent, whose likeness we share, bless our people.
Bless Indigenous Australians and the most recent migrants.
Bless the descendents of European convicts and settlers,
the Asians, Pacific Islanders and new refugees arriving from far lands.

Loving Jesus, give wisdom and grace to our nation.
We pray for the prime minister, premiers, ministers, parliaments, councils
and courts.
For service organisations and welfare groups.
We pray for those who represent us overseas: ambassadors, exchange
students, athletes, tourists, aid workers, peacekeeping forces and
missionaries.

Loving Spirit, continue your ministry through the churches of this wide and
diverse land.
Bless the old denominations and the new, the rigid and relaxed, the high
church and charismatic, the large and the small.
Bless the Uniting Church, its synods, presbyteries, networks, congregations
and assembly.
Bless the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, its
congregations and communities of faith.
Strengthen us all, that we may be reconciled with each other and united in
your service of evangelism, social justice, pastoral care, education, worship,
witness and fellowship.

Spirit of God
Gift of Pentecost
Remake us in the likeness of Christ
That we may live in your glory,
From here to eternity.
Amen.

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Adapted with permission

The Lord's Prayer

The Offering

*Please consider using the offering or a special retiring offering today for the work of the
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in its ministry to Aboriginal people. –
for contact details see References*

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.

Prayer from the liturgy provided by the Uniting Church SA at the time of the Prime Minister's apology to the stolen generations.

Hymn: When I needed a Neighbour

AHB 558 TIS 629

Words of Mission:

In the power of your Holy Spirit send us out to love and serve the Lord and in your mercy and compassion walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

You are our hope.

Amen.

Words of Mission © National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (adapted)

Other resources

Some Sermon Notes & Ideas starters

Acts 2:4-12 (New International Version)

⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

The miracle at Pentecost has special meaning for Indigenous people. In recent days two language groups in the NT celebrated the translation of the Bible into their own languages. When God's word comes to people in their own language it is Pentecost all over again. Those of us who have long been able to read scripture in our own language and with multiple translations have no idea what this means. Are there people in your congregation that use a Bible in a language other than English? Ask them to bring it, and share the Acts reading when the scripture is read. Later they might share what they feel about the scripture in their mother language and why it is important to them.

Recently a minister commenced studying Pitjantjatjara because a large number in the congregation came from the north of South Australia where this is the mother language. When he began to use the language in reading scripture the result was palpable. Faces lit up with a radiance not before seen in worship and many have since been encouraged to take a more active part in worship and leading using language.

The story in Acts is in contrast to that of the Tower of Babel where confusion reigns as people are scattered and separated by many languages. At Pentecost those of many language groups and nations hear and understand the message in their own language. The Spirit brings people together in a new relationship of understanding. People are not asked to lose their culture but rather the Spirit builds bridges across the language divides. Everyone can receive God's blessings without having to lose their ethnic identity.

²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Acts 17:26-28 (NIV)

Aboriginal people in the Congress believe that God's Spirit spoke to them in their own culture before the coming of Captain Cook. And with the Gospel, Aboriginal Christians can test which parts of their culture are true, and what to keep or discard. This contrasts with the message of many missionaries that all of their culture was evil and therefore their language needed to be suppressed and their children removed from evil influences. At the same time we non Aboriginal Christians have often been blind to the evil in our own culture.

It's not just simple translation. With respect to the Pitjantjatjara speaking people of northern South Australia, Rev. Bill Edwards speaking at a recent meeting said, *"Of the 51 parables in the gospels, 5 had some relevance to Aboriginal life but not very close relevance; although unrelated to everyday happenings, 30 referred to aspects of life introduced through culture contact, including shepherding and gardening of the mission's program; 16 had little or no relevance. So the parables as presented didn't have much relevance to Pitjantjatjara life. I sought to find analogies from familiar features such as hunting, tracking, dingoes, ant lions and eagles... In addition to the selection of culturally relevant elements of the scriptures, one must find cultural parallels which will make possible apprehension of biblical truths within the context of contemporary life. The Pitjantjatjara preachers were able to take these suggestions to a deeper level and use them really effectively."*

We have come a long way since then. We have become aware of the rich cultures of Aboriginal people and their deep spiritual connection with the land. And we have become aware of the damage we have done to them as a European culture imposing its values and power over them. We are beginning at last to seriously seek to overcome the negative aspects that have contributed to the gaps in health, education, housing, employment and life expectancy. We have overcome our racism..... or have we?

221 years on, we remain a land of bigots

TORY SHEPHERD
HEALTH REPORTER

SHOCKING levels of racism exist in Adelaide, a study has found.

Flinders University researchers have found, 221 years after Europeans first arrived in Australia, Aboriginal people face discrimination in public places and institutions, and the distress racism causes affects their health.

The authors of *In Our Own Backyard* said it appeared racism was alive and well, with more than nine in 10 Aboriginal people experiencing bias, abuse and violence, and two thirds experiencing it often.

They also found twice as many Aboriginal people were teetotalers, compared with non-Aborigines, while three times as many smoked. Most Aboriginal people surveyed felt society did not look after disadvantaged people.

One woman, Amy, said racism made her feel physically ill.

"...it's like a shockwave you

"A week later and it's still playing on your mind ... I just feel sick in the guts."

- AMY, TALKING ABOUT THE EFFECT OF RACISM

know, you have the ripple effect ... a week later and it's still playing on your mind ... I just feel sick in the guts or you might throw up," she said.

Professor Fran Baum said the research team was shocked by the "persistent and relentless racism that Aboriginal people in Adelaide face in their everyday lives".

"They're things like being verbally abused, being called names, going to a shop and feeling they were being ignored," she said.

Another researcher, Dr Anna Ziersch, said people experienced racism in a range of settings and

it could lead to them avoiding the doctor, education, or other institutions. "A huge proportion talked about being frustrated, being angry," she said.

"People who experience racism regularly have poor mental health. They talked about the stress of racism ... a sense of hopelessness."

The researchers said "closing the gap" between indigenous and non-indigenous life expectancy, which is 17 years, would be impossible if racism was not addressed.

They suggest a range of policies, including making indigenous culture more accessible to the mainstream, teaching more Aboriginal history and encouraging more Aboriginal-controlled organisations.

Aboriginal health-care worker Simon Peisley, who took part in the study, said people needed to work together and acknowledge Aboriginal people as the first people in Australia.

The Advertiser 27/3/09 p 13

Only a few weeks ago (March 2009), a report was released by the Flinders University on a three-year study conducted by researchers at Flinders University.

The goal of closing the gap in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is unlikely to be met unless racism is tackled, according to the research.

The findings, from a major new report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in urban areas, confirms a direct link between racism and poor health outcomes.

In Our Own Backyard: Urban health inequities and Aboriginal experiences of neighbourhood life, social capital and racism is the result of a three-year study conducted by researchers at Flinders University's Southgate Institute with the support of the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health.

One of the project's chief investigators, Dr Anna Ziersch said 93 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who took part in the study reported experiencing racism.

"We found that experiencing regular racism was associated with poor health," Dr Ziersch said.

"But racism also is also experienced when trying to meet basic needs such as renting a house or going to the supermarket," she said.

Dr Ziersch said addressing racism is likely to have better health outcomes than a single-minded focus on lifestyle behaviours.

"Compared to the general population, twice as many Aboriginal people did not drink and most exercised regularly - and yet they had worse physical and mental health."

"The Federal Government's aspiration to close the gap will not be achieved unless Australians from all walks of life are aware that racism is unacceptable," Dr Ziersch said.

<http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2009/03/26/racism-major-obstacle-to-indigenous-wellbeing/>

The following is taken from the "Subverting Racism" materials on the Uniting Justice website.

'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me'. So runs a piece of misguided schoolyard wisdom. Of course, the opposite is true. Words are powerful weapons. Broken bones heal. Psychological abuse can scar for life.

'Name-calling' is designed to hurt; it's intended to cut and bruise more deeply than any stone or stick. Many people have been brought to tears and bullied into submission through fear of being ridiculed or made to feel different. This is especially the experience of the migrant - suffering in silence (mostly) as their accent, or their food, or their name or their place of birth becomes the source of fun in the brew-room. More tragically, and more obviously, the experience is far worse if you happen to have skin that is not a lighter shade of pink.

Here-in lies the destructive power of vilification: using a person's natural identity as the raw material for abuse; taking what makes someone different and using it against them. Coercion and exclusion of this kind takes many forms but vilification on the basis of race, religion, gender etc, is extremely destructive for individuals and society alike.

Serious incidents of racial (and religious) hatred do happen in Australia. However, news of these incidents is not well publicised and many incidents go unreported, often because victims feel powerless.

- Aboriginal Ministers in the Uniting Church have reported being the victims of racial hate mail.
- A flier was produced in Victoria which insulted Christianity and vilified Aboriginal people by claiming that the Bible identifies whites as God's chosen race and that Aboriginal people are ungrateful dogs and swine.

A CHRISTIAN REFLECTION

The New Testament book of James goes much farther in its treatment of that most destructive of all weapons - the tongue. The writer likens the tongue to the rudder of a large ship or a small fire that sets a forest ablaze. Listen to this!

the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.

The writer goes on to ask, 'Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water?' (James 3)

The writings of James have a very practical application. We are urged not to speak evil against one another (James 4: 11). Community relations are important to James and inseparable from the character of our Christian witness.

Anti-vilification legislation supports something that lies at the heart of our faith. Through the ages, in its rhetoric and often through its actions, the church has tried to defend, protect and empower the most vulnerable in society. At this present moment in history, who is more vulnerable than a minority ethnic group struggling to exist on the fringes of a strange community?

Some groups, including some within the Christian community, have raised concerns about Anti-vilification Legislation. The fear is that such legislation cuts across the right to freely proclaim one's religion. It does nothing of the sort. We need to remember that the right to free speech does not include the right to vilify, or encourage hatred of others based on their race or religion. 'Rights' are always held in balance and tension. Freedom comes with responsibilities, and the right to free speech surely must be balanced with the right of others to live free from vilification on any grounds.

Regretfully, some people exert their right to speak freely to release their venom and vent their fear. Free speech is often the tool of the powerful and dominant. The 'protection' available under this right is used to sow seeds of evil in communities that are ethnically diverse and religiously plural.

Dominant groups that are part of dominating cultures seldom know what it is like to be vilified. They have the power to defend themselves with all the social and legal mechanisms at their disposal. The right to hold and express personal opinions must be respected but it is not immune from limitations placed upon it by other important and equally valid rights.

As we contemplate the evils of racism and ageism and all the other isms that seek to categorise people and exclude them, we need to heed the call of Jesus to stand apart from those who see evil and complain about it but don't do a single thing to change it. For evil to abound it is only necessary that good people do nothing.

http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/images/pdfs/resources/sunday/2003/sticksandstones_2003.pdf

What is of real concern is that as the recession starts to bite it will be even harder for Aboriginal people to find employment and access services and that others will react to their own misfortune by vilifying Aboriginal people.

Is the Church exempt from Racism? Unfortunately, no. The following observations from an Aboriginal perspective were made by an Aboriginal person.

The Australian church's racism is evident in its abysmal failure to stand united against racism in this country. Recognizing the existence of racism *in general* is the easy part, and so, many churches decry this evil in the widest possible terms. Some churches even go the next step and recognize the existence of racism in the church itself. The Uniting Church in Australia, for example, admits that

racism is still respectable in parts of our society, and in some parts of our church. There are still myths and stories and attitudes that deny a full place in society to Aboriginal people and to many people from Asia.(UCA1989:4)

But, churches decry racism in very general terms in their policy statements and declarations and it is very rare to see churches or even individual church people take a stand – especially when and where it counts.

Pattel-Gray (p159)

Exemptions

Australian church racism arguably is most condemnable when the churches proclaim themselves "exempt" from certain specific statutes of civil law, namely the codes involving racial discrimination (as well as equal opportunity legislation) (ACC 1993). The churches have long maintained that they are somehow different than any other institution or organization in Australia, including government, business, education and other private sectors. This belief has led them to exclude themselves - in no uncertain terms - from the provision of laws which enforce nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, etc. If a case arises in which the churches are accused of racism or racist practices, they simply hide behind the curtain of "exemption" and walk away free.

Pattel-Gray (p160)

Slaves to the Sin of Racism

In Romans 6:15-23 the Apostle Paul talks of "the two slaveries".

Using this simple biblical illustration, it is clear that the Australian church is a slave to the sin of racism, because it continues to serve the master called "Racism". The Australian church does not struggle to its *maximum* capacity for land rights; it distorts its memory; it allows the crises of leadership and theological education to continue; it makes ambivalent statements; it fails to stand for justice on Christ's integrity, it claims exemptions; it ignores the problem of racism.

Pattel-Gray (p162)

Have we made any progress in the ten years since these statements were made?

Some quotes from Harvey L Perkins, General Secretary, Methodist Overseas Missions in Mission: Call to Community, Leigh College Open Lectures, Autumn Series, 1974.

Racism is made up of assumptions and assumptions are not questioned unless they are challenged. Those assumptions produce a sense of something being inherent in the nature of things, and therefore beyond question..... For hundreds of years the race issue had been no problem to western Christians at all because it had been taken as natural that the white race was superior to others. In fact the questions relating to order – the natural order, the social order – have been so taken for granted that the love of God has been proclaimed almost entirely within the ambit of personal relationships until we virtually believe that that is the limit of the power of the love of God. That has been the basic style of the Church for so many centuries, and it is not much different today. We haven't really begun to question ourselves seriously about our involvement in 'systemic racism' yet. Perkins (p31, 32)

But people say that kind of thing happens amongst all peoples. If you like, it is part of human sinfulness. So why pick on the white man in particular? ... White racism has special historical significance today because its roots lie in powerful, highly developed countries. White racism is the most dangerous form of racism in the world today because social, economic and political structures are organised around it. Perkins (p33)

The key to white racism is dominance. In Australia that kind of white racism is everywhere, simply because the economic, legal and political institutions of our society produce white dominance and privilege over non-whites – let us call it, intentional or otherwise, institutional racism. And let us not deny it, for it is not a matter of intention but effect. The Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, they have been pauperised and they have been crushed by our condescending offer to them to follow our 'balanda' way of life (as *Yolgnu* call it), and leave their past and their people for our society. Perkins (p34)

...we will be compelled to face our own racism when we face the fact that it is not just a matter of personal attitudes and relationships, but it is a matter of the system we belong to. Perkins (p38)

How to look good as a church but do nothing about the system:

- follow a policy of colour indifference or neutrality. Give equal opportunity to all but do not try to redress any basic inequality between the powerful and the powerless.
- be sympathetic to illnesses and distress, serving with charitable aid but do not call into question any challenge from them to institutional structures.
- reward and encourage those who imitate our values and culture and help them move into it, but discourage any efforts to produce institutional alternatives like their own organisations or styles of living like communalism which challenges capitalist structures. - adapted from Perkins (p38,39)

"The most subtle form of injustice is the equal treatment of unequals" - Rousseau.

Following hot on the heels of the Advertiser article was this report in the Sydney Morning Herald on April 7, 2009 by Professor George Williams (Anthony Mason professor of law, University of NSW).

THE Rudd Government has made two important symbolic statements on indigenous rights. The first was the apology to the stolen generations. The second came on Friday when it gave formal support to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While both are important steps forward, neither can hide the fact that Australia's legal system still reflects the racism of our past.

Critics of the declaration have raised fears that it will undermine Australian law and democracy. The shadow attorney-general, George Brandis, described support for it as a "grave error" that could have "grave consequences".

In fact, the problem is that the declaration does not do enough. Rather than being law, it is merely a non-binding (and thus unenforceable) statement of values by the UN.

Even then, the declaration comes with major qualifications. For example, Aborigines are said to "have the right to self-determination". However, the declaration says this must not be interpreted "as authorising or encouraging" anything that would undermine "the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states". All of the Aboriginal rights must also be exercised in a way that respects the rights of others.

Others have lauded our support for the declaration, such as the Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, who described it as a "watershed moment" in Australia's relationship with its indigenous people. While supporting the declaration will bolster the country's international reputation, it will not do anything by itself to change the dismal state of Australian law.

The problems go to the root of our legal system. In 1901, Australia gained a system of government of its own design, which allows parliaments to discriminate against people on the basis of their race. Laws such as the White Australia policy were not an aberration, but an expectation of this system. While that law and many like it have been expunged from the statute book, the racist premise of our constitution remains.

This is an example of institutionalised racism. How should we as Christians respond to this?

The limitation of the gospel to personal relationships means no real change from a racist society.

The last word on this issue comes appropriately from the Congress. We need to really learn to listen if we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us today. We need to truly search our hearts to see what is really there, and we need to take action, personally and as a church.

The Congress does not limit the gospel. It calls for a holistic gospel....

The primary aim of Congress is *holistic evangelism*. Aboriginal and Islander Christians want to respond to the command of Jesus to "*Go and make disciples*".

Holistic evangelism means caring for the whole person.

We want to be free to engage in holistic ministry of our people.

Yes we want them to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. . . .

And yes, we are concerned about *housing, employment, training, community development, alcohol rehabilitation, land rights, health and youth work*.

Aboriginal people are looking for the practicality of the Gospel that will reach my people and pull them up.

Rev. Charles Harris, First President of the Congress

<http://www.congress.org.au/belief/believe1.php>

Some quotes –

It is the consensus of private persons that gives racism its derivative power . . . The power of racism is the power conceded by those respectable people who by their action or inaction communicate the consensus which directs [and] empowers the overt bigot to act on their behalf.

Anne Pattel-Gray(p180)

You don't have to dig too deeply to see the very real consequences that have flowed from 216 years of injustice since white settlement in Australia. On any social measure of health and well-being, Indigenous people, my people, are hugely over represented at the wrong end of the scale. No matter whether you look at life expectancy, health profiles, custody figures, educational outcomes, unemployment, substance abuse, domestic violence, suicide — you name it — the trend is the same. An Indigenous underclass is developing in Australia. And there is a very real danger that this underclass will become permanent, a monument to deprivation, poverty and ill health perpetuated by neglect, institutionalised racism and the tunnel vision of governments.

Lowitja O'Donoghue

Despite the suffering and trauma expressed within the stories of the Stolen Children,

the responses of Aboriginal people have been extraordinarily generous.

This is a time when we need that spirit of generosity.

It is a time to feel the connections of a shared past.

It is a time to guard against things that fragment us.

And it is a time to cherish

- those things which bring us together
- those things which have helped us to survive,
- those things that will create a better future for us all.

Lowitja O'Donoghue

quoted in *Why Prayerline* compiled by Jon Inkpin on behalf of the *Decade to Overcome Violence initiative* in Australia with the support of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission.

The challenge to us Australians today is not to let political power nor material wealth nor our own opinions and convictions cause us to exclude those whose backgrounds are different.

Bishop Brian Kyme, Diocese of Perth

Some Information on the Congress

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

The UAICC:

- consists of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia and members in fellowship who may also be members of any other denomination;
- ***is made up of Aboriginal and Islander people seeking to fulfil their calling as Christians among their own people, especially in the area of wholistic community development;***
- determines its own goals and objectives and decides its policies and priorities;
- runs its own programs and institutions;
- aims, in collaboration with other people, to bring to an end the injustices which hold Aboriginal and Islander people at the bottom/on the fringes of Australian society.

We are Aboriginal and Islander Christians from all over Australia, who have come together to form a national Congress as a result of a vision grasped in a conference held at Crystal Creek, North Queensland, in 1984.

The Congress seeks to unite in one fellowship all Aboriginal and Islander Christians who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord, accept the authority of the Scriptures and desire to follow and serve Christ as his disciples.

The UAICC was established by resolution of the Uniting Church Assembly in 1985. We are part of the Uniting Church, but Congress determines its own goals and objectives and decides its policies and priorities.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress is now the largest non-government indigenous agency in Australia. It operates in all States and the Northern Territory, as Regional Councils in Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory, Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and as Calvary Presbytery in Queensland.

In South Australia (2008) the Congress has three congregations; Salisbury in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Kalparrin near Murray Bridge.

We desire to share in the struggles of our people, not for gain but because obedience to God demands nothing less.

Wholeness

Congress has developed a style of ministry - wholistic ministry - based on the way Jesus ministered and taught.

We proclaim the gospel as it relates to every part of life: the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, political and economic areas of human existence. No area escapes God's saving power, or avoids God's judgement.

The Congress does not exist to call people to itself, but to go to them and share in their struggle, wherever they are. Only by so doing can we follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We work under the guidance of God, the Holy Spirit, reaching out to those who are lost from God and in need of salvation, and to the poor, the hungry and those who are sick, oppressed, imprisoned or hurt in any way.

A Congregational Covenant

Many congregations are seeking to strengthen their commitment to covenanting with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Indigenous communities of Australia.

We suggest that it is the journey with Indigenous people which is most important – so we would emphasise that the process towards making the statement is just as important as the statement itself.

It is a journey for the congregation and a journey the congregation takes with Indigenous people. This means that it is important that there is an educational process for the congregation and a process of developing relationships with your local/regional Congress folk and your local/regional Indigenous community. Any statement needs to be the outcome of negotiations with Indigenous people – it is a covenantal statement after all, a statement of partnership.

For a congregational covenant to be meaningful it needs to say something about

- **Recognition and acknowledgement** of the problems of European contact, including the impact with the church.
- **Respecting and listening** to Indigenous people.
- **Understanding** our place in Australia.
- Recognition of traditional **Indigenous relationship to the land**.
- **A commitment to covenant and journey together**.

Further information on Covenanting can be obtained from the Covenanting Coordinator, Presbytery Synod of South Australia. Email: prussell@sa.uca.org.au

References

Some definitions:

.... a Christian thrust at describing racism at the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches
“By racism we mean ethnocentric pride in one’s own racial group and preference for the distinctive characteristics of that group; belief that these characteristics are fundamentally biological in nature and are thus transmitted to succeeding generations; strong negative feelings towards other groups who do not share these characteristics, coupled with the thrust to discriminate against and exclude the outgroup from full participation in the life of the community” (Perkins, 33)

Racism is primarily about power. It is about one racial group using its power to maintain economic, political and social power over another, and to denigrate, discriminate against or destroy that other group.

Racism may be personal or structural. Personal racism is our individual attitudes and actions towards people who we view as different. Structural racism is the racism that is built into the policies and processes of our nation. It affects the way public policy works in Australia and it effects our relationships with other nations and peoples.

Personal racism is found in our values, assumptions, attitudes, words, and behaviours.

Structural racism is contained in the values, presumptions, structures, and processes of social, economic, cultural, and political institutions.

These two forms of racism overlap. Public policy is shaped not only by government, but by the electorate. The personal racism of Australians can affect our nation as a whole, as well as people beyond the borders of Australia. Structural racism is intertwined with ethnic, cultural and religious discrimination.

(Subverting Racism, Action and Reflection Kit : All About Racism)

The definition of racial discrimination used in Australia’s *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)* is the one contained in Article 1 of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. It defines racism as:

...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

The Australian Government ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1975 and made it part of Australian law through the *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)*.

This act was suspended by the Howard Government as part of the NT Intervention. Its reinstatement has been promised by the Rudd government for later in 2009. How easy it is to remove people’s human rights!

Thukeri - Story Ideas and using the Activity Sheet

The text of the Thukeri story can be downloaded with the Thukeri notes which provide ideas for using the worksheet and questions for discussion. Download the pdf file from the covenanting website.

Some other Sources:

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress – South Australia

Address all correspondence to:

PO Box 1044

Salisbury SA 5108

P: (08) 8281 1614 F: (08) 8281 1577

Resource Officer: Ian Dempster P: (08) 8281 1614 M: 0417 217 320 E: idempster@sa.uca.org.au

UAICC Websites

National – currently off line

Port Augusta - <http://www.congress.org.au>

Reconciliation Australia

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/>

Racism makes me sick

Racism has recently been recognised in a number of key reports as a threat to public health in Australia. A range of health problems including high blood pressure and heart disease, depression, anxiety, low birth rate and premature birth can all be caused directly by people's personal experiences of racism.

Get the facts and support the campaign - <http://www.antar.org.au/racism>

Action and Reflection Kit – Black and White - An Australian Story

Includes a story told by by Monica Morgan, at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's National Conference on Racism, Beyond Tolerance, 12-13 March 2002 which shows how current structures and laws continue to discriminate against justice for Aboriginal people. It also includes other useful material.

http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/images/pdfs/resources/sunday/2003/blackandwhite_2003.pdf

- part of the Subverting Racism materials prepared for Social Justice Sunday 2003, reference below.

Acknowledgements

Material has been sourced from:

NATSIEC

Worship resources prepared by Rev. John P. Brown on the NATSIEC website and material originally prepared and/or written by Peter Lewis. <http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec/resources/liturgies>

Subverting Racism – Social Justice Sunday 2003:

includes "Liturgical and Theological Resources" & an "Action and Reflection Kit".

<http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/images/pdfs/resources/sunday/2003/2003fullkit.pdf>

Racism major obstacle to Indigenous wellbeing

Posted on: March 26th, 2009 by Marketing and Communications

<http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2009/03/26/racism-major-obstacle-to-indigenous-wellbeing/>

The full report can be downloaded at:

http://som.flinders.edu.au/FUSA/PublicHealth/PDF_Files/InOurOwnBackyard-LR.pdf

Pattel-Gray, Anne **The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia**, critically appraised from an Aboriginal historic-theological viewpoint, Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia, 1998

Perkins, Harvey L. **Mission: Call to Community**, The Leigh College Open Lectures, Autumn Series, 1974

Prewer, Bruce D **Australian Prayers**, revised and expanded, Openbook, 2002

Williams, George **Racist premise of our constitution remains**, Sydney Morning Herald, April 7, 2009

<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/racist-premise-of-our-constitution-remains-20090406-9utm.html>