

Worship Resources for Reconciliation Sunday 1 June 2014

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 **1 June**.

This is the eighth year that we have prepared worship resources for use on Reconciliation Sunday. Some of the resources have been sourced from those produced by Assembly for 'A Destiny Together'. The full set of these resources can be accessed from:

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/adedestinytogether>

Other resources are either new or have been sourced from those we produced in previous years. The full set of the resources for this year and those for previous years may be downloaded from the Mission Resourcing SA Website:

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

Please feel free to use all or part of any of these resources in planning worship for Reconciliation Sunday this year.

The resources include:

1. A complete order of service
2. Suggested hymns (separate downloads)
3. A Powerpoint of an Adnyamathanha story that can be used with children, along with discussion notes (2 separate downloads)
4. A Powerpoint of two prayers and the Preamble with an Adnyamathanha story embedded within it (separate download)
5. A Powerpoint of stimuli for silent intercessory prayer
6. Some material for consideration when sermon writing
7. General information on the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and Covenanting (separate download)
8. Other Resources for Parents and Playgroups

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Order of Service for 1 June 2014

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 we gather to worship because here in this land, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, we have A Destiny Together. In the Revised Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, we recognise that “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 of these lands and waters since time immemorial”.

We remember that “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.”

Greeting:

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

Gathering Prayer:

God of love and grace, who created this land and all creation, we affirm that you are a God of community and reconciliation. We pray for your wisdom and spirit that we might become a forgiving and reconciling community, open to all peoples, languages and cultures. Amen.

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners or 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.

We acknowledge the people, the traditional custodians of the We acknowledge the wisdom of their Elders both past and present and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all Australian communities. We pray, therefore, that in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit we might work together for reconciliation and justice in this land.

or

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 are available as a separate downloads. They have been brought together to assist in selection. All suit the theme of reconciliation. The choice is up to those planning this service. We particularly recommend the new version of "The Great Southland" by Geoff Bullock.

Responsive Prayer

This is on the Powerpoint provided as a separate download.

God of Holy Dreaming, Great Creator Spirit, from the dawn of creation you have given your children the good things of Mother Earth.

You spoke and the gum tree grew.

In the vast desert and the dense forest, and in the cities and at the water's edge, creation sings your praises.

Your presence endures as the rock at the heart of our Land.

When Jesus hung on the tree you heard the cries of all your people and became one with your wounded ones: the convicts, the hunted, and the dispossessed.

The sunrise of your Son coloured the earth anew, and bathed it in glorious hope.

In Jesus we have been reconciled to you, to each other and to your whole creation.

Lead us on, Great Spirit, as we gather from the four corners of the earth; enable us to walk together in trust from the hurt and shame of the past into the full day which has dawned in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution (part 1):

This is on the Powerpoint provided as a separate download.

As the Uniting 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 lands, 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.

Adnyamathanha Children's Story: *The Gum Tree Couple (Wida Ardapa)*

The Gum Tree Couple story is available in two narrated formats (either embedded in the Preamble or in its own Powerpoint and there are story notes to go with it – see downloads). Alternatively, one of the narrated stories from previous years may be downloaded and used.

The Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution (part 2):

This is on the Powerpoint provided as a separate download.

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.

Prayer for Reconciliation:

This is on the Powerpoint provided as a separate download.

Lord God, bring us together as one,
Reconciled with you and with each other.
You made us in your likeness.
You gave us your Son, Jesus Christ.
He has given to us forgiveness from sin.
Lord God, bring us together as one,
Different in culture, but given new life in Jesus Christ:
Together as your body, your church, your people.
Lord God, bring us together as one,
Reconciled, healed, forgiven,
Sharing you with others as you have called us to do.
In Jesus Christ, let us be together as one.

Hymn:

Scripture readings:

Acts 1: 6-14

Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35

1 Peter 4: 12-14, 5: 6-11

John 17: 1-11

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

Hymn:

Intercessory Prayers:

A Powerpoint of stimuli for silent intercessory prayer is available as a separate download,

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. This year the Pilgrimage of Healing Appeal will focus on building developments for Oodnadatta Faith Community and Adelaide Congress Congregation at Salisbury. See separate UAICC Appeal Information download for details of the project and where/how to forward proceeds raised.

Prayer of Dedication:

As we dedicate our offering and our prayers, we return to the place where we began, in the circular mode of listening and talking of the Aboriginal peoples. We pray for healing, forgiveness and restoration for all peoples who call Australia home. Cleanse us from the racism that lurks in the dark corners of our souls. 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.

Reconciliation Prayer:

As we pray this prayer together, we especially remember Rev Ken Sumner who is now heading NATSIEC for the National Council of Churches in Australia.

God of love,

You are the creator of this land and all good things.

We acknowledge the pain and shame of our history

and the suffering of our peoples

and we ask your forgiveness.

We thank you for the survival of Indigenous cultures.

Our hope is in you

We pray for your strength and grace to forgive, accept and love one another as you love us and forgive and accept us.

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history so that we may build a better future for our nation.

Teach us to respect all cultures.

Teach us to care for our land and waters.

Help us to share justly the resources of this land.

Help us to bring about spiritual and social change to improve the quality of life for all groups in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.

Help our young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit.

May your power and love be the foundations on which we build our families, our communities and our nation. Amen.

*Adapted from words prepared by the Wontulp Bi-Buya Indigenous Theology Working Group, March 1997
© NATSIEC. Used with permission.*

Hymn:

Words of Mission:

People of God,

go from here to live out the covenant into which we,

the First and Second Peoples of this land,

have entered with one another.

Confront and challenge injustice wherever you see it.

Act justly yourselves and insist that others do the same.

Rejoice in the richness of our diverse cultures and learn from them.

Celebrate and demonstrate the unity we share.

Commit to worship, witness and serve as one people under God until God's promised reconciliation of all creation is complete.

Bless us, therefore, as we depart this place: give us a generous spirit, a kind heart, and the grace to walk alongside our Aboriginal sisters and brothers. Amen!

The peace of God be with you.

And also with you.

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

The notes accompanying the text of the Adnyamathanha story 'The Gum Tree Couple' show how the story relates to the final words of John 17: 11, the Gospel reading for the day: "...so that they may be one, as we are one", the theme of Reconciliation Sunday.

In addition, the following two messages from UCA President, Rev Professor Andrew Dutney, for the 'A Destiny Together' event provide plenty of ideas that can be integrated into sermons on this special day.

Additional resources that follow these provide further stimulus.

A Destiny Together: Time to Pray for Justice for Australia's First Peoples

Andrew Dutney

ABC Religion and Ethics

17 March 2014

Reconciliation between Australia's First Peoples and Second Peoples is central to our national identity. But reconciliation is a journey, not a destination. The question is not, "Are we there yet?" but rather, "How are we travelling?" or "Where have we got to?"

There have been moments when the answer has been truly encouraging, and indeed has energised us for the next part of the journey. The 2008 apology from the Australian Government to the Stolen Generations is one - second only to the overwhelming "Yes" vote in the 1967 referendum for being a moment when First and Second peoples could say, "Yes, we're all in this together. Reconciliation is possible." As a nation, we heard the stories, learned the names of those who suffered and were, eventually, moved to act and say, "We are sorry."

We are addicted to numbers and statistics. It seems that if something can't be measured, we wonder if it's worth paying attention to. Well, there are many numbers related to Aboriginal wellbeing, and they are not good.

The statistics are the grim signs of disadvantage across a range of socio-economic indicators such as health, housing, education and employment. But it's still the stories, the narratives of ordinary people's lives spun together as a tapestry of light and dark and all the shades in between, that reveal so much more than numbers on a page and which most often move us to act.

That's how it was for the hundreds of Uniting Church in Australia representatives crowded into a room in the heart of Adelaide for the thirteenth national Assembly in July 2012. Reconciliation is central to Christian identity too, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." And reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Church is fundamental. We are one body in Christ. So, at that Assembly we heard stories of dispossession, discrimination and suffering directly from those who lived under the discriminatory aspects of the Intervention, locked in by the Stronger Futures legislation that had passed through the Senate barely a fortnight before.

For many in the room that day, it was the first time the statistics had been given faces and names. Those listening as the reality of suffering was named were palpably moved by the experience. It felt brutal to touch the wounds forged by decades of racism and systemic

exclusion - to hear how an elderly woman felt shamed when standing in a separate queue at the supermarket; to hear a young father worried about his children attending a school where his language and culture were not prioritised; to hear a young person cry out in pain at the memory of her friends who have taken their own lives.

They were the awful stories of our sisters and brothers in Christ. But in the brutality of the truths we were confronted with, we were gifted with the opportunity of transformation.

The words in our recently revised Church Constitution gained a new resonance: that we are in covenant with each other, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in the Uniting Church, First Peoples and Second Peoples, "that all may see a destiny together."

Moved to action by the people who shared their stories, the Assembly resolved to call members of the Church to a week of prayer and fasting for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. That week begins today. It is an opportunity to express our shared grief at the continued injustice too many face, while providing the opportunity to act in solidarity and bear witness to reconciliation. The week includes a public prayer vigil on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra - a site far removed from the realities of life in remote communities, and yet so significant as the source of political power in this nation.

We will examine our own life in the light of our covenant we entered into in 1994, the apology we made as a Church in 1997 and the change to our Constitution made in 2009. We will share why it matters to all of us in this nation that we change our constitution to acknowledge Australia's First Peoples.

As we engage in conversations of suffering and survival, we will be renewed in faith - faith that the hope God has given us will not disappoint; faith in the power of God in Christ to bring divided peoples together; and faith that this will be the first of many occasions that the Uniting Church goes beyond the statistics to the names and faces of those who suffer.

In this week of prayer and fasting, we will have a foretaste of that reconciliation and renewal that is the end in view for the whole creation.

A reflection by UCA President Rev Prof Andrew Dutney on 1 Corinthians 13, delivered

Prayer vigil for *A Destiny Together*
Parliament House Lawns, Canberra
Tuesday, 18 March 2014

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

That's how Paul sums it up in one of his letters. The command to love is specifically addressed to the Christian congregation. It's about how we must treat each other. The congregation is called to do just this one thing - to love each other. Everything else flows from that.

The love that Paul is writing about is nothing to do with the sentimental, romantic love of popular culture. It's the love that Christians owe each other in the day to day life of the new community that God is making of them.

And in the case of the Corinthian congregation that day to day life was a mess. In the chapters that come before the one we heard read, Paul called them out on their internal

divisions, their jealousy and quarrelling, their inability to manage sexual relationships, their perpetuation of class-based inequities even when they gathered for worship. For heaven's sake, their internal disputes even had them taking each other to court! (1:10-12; 3:3-21; 5; 6:1-8; 11:18-22)

In this context, in chapter 12, he tries to help them think of themselves as being like a body, with all sorts of different members - every one of which is important to the health and life of the whole. In this body, "If one member suffers all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured all rejoice together with it" (12:26). He tries to get them to think of themselves as Christ's body. And then he moves into the crescendo of chapter 13.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things." (13:4-7)

These are the ordinary practices of Christian love. Practices that - if we sustain them - will be used by the Spirit to transform our fellowship. The command to love is specifically addressed the Christian congregation. It's about how we must treat each other. The congregation is called to do just this one thing - to love each other. Everything else flows from that.

God puts together a congregation of people who don't belong together, and have no history of getting along together - Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28). God puts together people who don't belong together and says to them, Love one another.

And it's hard, really hard. Here in Australia God puts First Peoples and Second Peoples together in one congregation. It can be hard enough for the First Peoples to be together - more than 400 nations from the Adnyamathanha to the Yolngu. It's hard for our multicultural Second Peoples to be together too - everyone from Anglos to Zambians. But God goes further. In Christ God puts First Peoples and Second Peoples together in one body and calls us to do just one thing: love one another.

Why? Why would God do this? Because in Jesus Christ God fulfilled his promise to Abram: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Why? Because "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Why? Because "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

God commands us to do one thing: to love one another. Because in doing that we become a sign of what God has done in Christ for the whole world.

That's why we're here today. We've come to the most public place we can think of to stand together as First and Second Peoples and say, "We're very different from each other. In many ways we're very divided. But in Christ we have been made into one body... and we're in pain."

The cruel injustice and crushing disadvantage that our members from the First Peoples deal with every day hurts us all. So we've committed ourselves to the task of working towards justice and reconciliation in the church - through our Covenant, through the truth-telling of our amended Constitution, and through all the day to day, practical loving of one another that they imply.

God has commanded us to do just one thing: to love one another. In doing that we become a sign to Australia of what God has done in Christ for the whole nation and the whole world.

David Penberthy: We must recognise the historical truth

Sunday Mail (SA) 20 April 2014, p. 27

TWO Saturdays ago while at the football with my family I was approached by a lady who implored me to write a column about the referendum to recognise Aboriginal people in the Australian Constitution, and the comments by Sydney Swans footballer Adam Goodes in support of that campaign.

The woman was upset by Goodes' claim that day that our Constitution was "very, very racist". She was also upset about what she regarded as the "fiction" of the Stolen Generation. If she was deeply upset, I was deeply bored.

The prospect of an impromptu chat at the footy on the history of race relations didn't thrill me, and I hope I didn't sound rude as I explained that I didn't agree, and was just interested in watching the game.

Anyway, this column is for her, even though it's probably not the column she had in mind.

I can see why people such as this woman were put out by Goodes' remark. I admire the bloke, both as a footballer and as a leader, but I did feel that he overdid it when he fired up about the 13-year-old girl who called him a name during a game in Melbourne last year. I'm not sure whether that girl meant that word as a racist term, or a generalised insult she might have aimed at anyone of any hue. This sad episode may have had less to do with the time-old question of racism than the more modern problems of manners.

The difference between Adam Goodes, the 13-year-old girl, the woman at the footy and me is that only one of us is an [I]ndigenous Australian who knows what it's like to experience the treatment blokes such as Goodes have faced. We can either huff and puff about what Goodes said – be it last year at the footy, or two weeks ago about the Constitution – or we can listen to it and try to empathise.

We can also ignore it completely and focus instead on the policy matter at hand. The debate about the referendum is being inflamed by the usual inflammers, who are billing it as a precursor to billions of dollars in compo for past wrongs, a broader rewriting of other laws, a new era in unchecked welfare spending.

It's none of those things. Nor is it some attempt by militants in the so-called "Aboriginal industry" – a term coined by Pauline Hanson – to expand their power. If it were an industry, it would have gone into receivership years ago, as its defining features are higher rates of mortality, unemployment, incarceration, alcoholism and domestic violence.

The argument for a "yes" vote is not being spearheaded by an Aboriginal "industry" but the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, who used his New Year's Day message this year to start a conversation about the recognition of indigenous people as the first Australians.

If the whole thing is a communist plot, Abbott makes an unusual frontman. His blinkered critics might not acknowledge the fact but his position is in keeping with a longstanding commitment to practical reconciliation which, in 2009, saw him criticise John Howard for failing to apologise to the Stolen Generation.

Abbott's view was that we should not get mired in debate about the extent or intent of past practices, but use an apology to draw a line under what had happened so the country could move on.

In championing constitutional change, Abbott is not hailing some return to the days of an unchecked political hierarchy such as ATSIC, nor a shift away from self-reliance in indigenous affairs. He has simply billed it as a chance to modernise the Constitution and reflect our true heritage.

What matters most are the words which are being deleted and introduced. These are the changes:

- Remove Section 25, which says the states can ban people from voting based on their race
- Remove section 51 (XXVI), which can be used to pass laws that discriminate against people based on their race
- Insert a new section 51A, to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to preserve the Australian government's ability to pass laws for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Insert a new section 116A, banning racial discrimination by government
- Insert a new section 127A, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages were this country's first tongues, while confirming that English is Australia's national language.

It is not even close to radical. Instead of getting sidetracked by a blue about Adam Goodes, or any other side issue, we should ask two simple questions:

1. Do we want any government in Australia to have the power to make racially based laws against any group of people?
2. Are we prepared to be polite enough to acknowledge that when the Europeans arrived, Aboriginal people were here happily minding their own business and, as such, should be counted as the first Australians?

The answer to question one should be an automatic "no".

The answer to question two should be a generous "yes".

There is no point getting bogged down in mischievous, baseless hypotheticals about whether recognising indigenous heritage could lead to something else. It will not. It is simply a case of recognising a historical truth.

The denial of that truth cannot rationalise everything which is wrong within modern indigenous Australia. But it informs it, as it must be a hell of a thing to feel like a second-class citizen in your own country, governed by a Constitution which pretends you were never there.

That day at the footy my side got done, badly. About the only high point was the ceaseless effort of a bloke called Eddie Betts, an Aboriginal Australian who, like so many others, has shone at our national game. It is weird that we can cheer our hearts out for a bloke like Betts but we can't find the heart to embrace something which might mean more to a man like him than any white person could ever understand.

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

Material has been sourced from:

Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Website: “A Destiny Together”
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/adeitytogether>

The Covenanting Website of the Uniting Church SA
<http://sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/reconciliation-sunday>

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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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David Penberthy: We must recognise the historical truth
Sunday Mail (SA) 20 April 2014, p. 27
<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/david-penberthy-constitution-needs-finetuning-we-owe-it-to-aboriginal-people/story-fni6unxq-1226889878013>