



NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK RESOURCE

2020



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY



27 MAY – 3 JUNE

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INTRODUCTION

At Crystal Creek, just north of Townsville, Queensland in 1982 a national gathering of First Peoples and Maori leaders from Aotearoa NZ came together. A vision was birthed for a 'black congress' within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). The following year in 1983 another national gathering took place at Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island, in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory to plan the work required for the vision to live. By 1985 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) was recognised by the UCA's National Assembly at its triennial meeting.

So began the UCA's Walking Together as First and Second Peoples, a journey of struggle, learning and commitment. Almost ten years after the recognition of the UAICC the UCA entered into a formal Covenant with the UAICC. Creating a binding commitment to one another and acknowledging the wrongs of the colonial past and the Church's part in these.

In 1996 the governing body of the Church acknowledged and apologised for its part in the policies which led to the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and the trauma that we now understand tragically became a generational legacy.

The deepening of the commitment to the journey came in 2009 when the National Assembly adopted a new [Preamble](#) to the UCA's Constitution. This Preamble formally recognised the tragic history of colonisation and the Church's part in this. In the Preamble the UCA also acknowledged that God was already present with the people before the arrival of the colonisers and committing to a 'destiny together'.

When the National Assembly met in 2018 it affirmed the Sovereignty of First Peoples and endorsed the recommendations of the 2017 Statement from the Heart.

The [UCA Vision for a Just Australia](#) (2019) has as its number one foundation:

A First Peoples Heart - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before colonisation, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First Peoples' sovereignty is affirmed. First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self-determination. As First and Second Peoples, we walk together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.

The Uniting Church in Australia with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress affirm the apologies, acknowledgements and commitments made in the last 38 years. We are in this together.

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT DR DEIDRE PALMER

Foundational to the Uniting Church is our commitment to being a “fellowship of reconciliation” that reflects the reconciling and renewing work of Christ in the world. (Paragraph 3 Basis of Union)

During this National Reconciliation Week, with the theme of “**In this together**”, there are opportunities for us as the Uniting Church to affirm our covenant relationship as First and Second Peoples and to strengthen our actions for justice, healing and reconciliation. “**At the heart of the journey of reconciliation are relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.**” (Source: [National Reconciliation Week website](#))

In February of this year, it was a joy for me to visit the Leprena centre in Tasmania, a centre of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. Leprena speaks of a being a ‘living narrative: sharing story, sharing struggle and sharing healing’ of First Peoples”. I had the wonderful opportunity to walk on country with our Congress leaders, Alison Overeem, and Grace and Ayla Williams. We were graciously welcomed to country and into a cleansing, healing space. Alison shared some of the story of Fanny Cochrane Smith and her church. We travelled to Tranquil Point and heard stories of First Peoples in that place. Alison, Grace and Ayla shared their living narrative of struggle, the call to justice that we need to hear and act on, and their stories of healing, light and hope. They invited us to “**continue to walk together, hearing, sharing and respecting stories of First Peoples, embracing the gift that First Peoples’ history and culture is in the life of the Uniting Church.**”

Each of us are called to contribute to the shaping of an Australian nation, which tells the truth of our history of colonisation, of First People’s dispossession, the devastating effects of colonisation on the First Peoples of this land, and the injustices that have been and continued to be perpetrated.

We need to address racism in our everyday lives and call it out.

This week is also an opportunity to celebrate First Peoples, their culture, law and custom, their connection to the land, and their resilience and survival as the oldest continuing culture in the world. This week is a celebration of the gifts, culture, stories and way of life that First Peoples bring in shaping 21st century Australia.

Adnyamathanha woman and UCA Minister Rev Denise Champion speaks of sharing the stories of First Peoples that invite us into “the long memory of God in this land.”

I invite you to take time in this week and beyond to listen to and hear the stories of First Peoples, who are your friends, neighbours, colleagues, classmates and members of our Church. Reconciliation grows as we deepen our relationships as First and Second Peoples, and appreciate what we bring to each other.

Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra OAM, a former Moderator of the UCA Northern Synod, a senior elder and Indigenous rights advocate writes:



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

As the Uniting Church, we acknowledge that as First and Second Peoples, ours is a “destiny together” - acknowledging the wrongs of the past and the present and committing ourselves to take action to bring about a more just Australia. We hear Jesus calling us into the light of reconciliation.

As we actively engaged in the process of reconciliation, God calls us toward and gifts us with a new human community of mutuality, dignity, care and compassion, and a respectful and deepened relationship with this ancient land.

Grace and peace,
Dr Deidre Palmer

This message is available in video form on the Uniting Church in Australia [Vimeo](#) page.



MESSAGE FROM PASTOR MARK KICKETT, INTERIM CHAIRPERSON, UAICC

REFLECTIONS ON RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a word that is used widely. It can be used in a variety of situations, but of late is often used in the context of first and second peoples and where colonisation has impacted first peoples globally.

Reconciliation in the New Testament is not a religious term, but rather a political one, where it refers to disputes resolution. So one could speak of the diplomatic reconciliation of warring nations, or in the sphere of personal relationships or the reconciliation of an estranged husband and wife.

When God's story is revealed, reconciliation takes a new focus as the apostle Paul speaks of a new way in doing relationships and that this begins with God and impacts all of creation.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19, Paul is proclaiming the transformation of the world and summoning us to see all things made new in light of that transformation and that the death and resurrection of Christ has abolished the old standards for what counts as power and persuasiveness and that we now possess the capacity to overcome alienations and establish new and peaceful relationships.

Uncle Ronnie Williams, a wonderful Aboriginal Pastor from WA, was visiting Ngarrindjeri Country in SA near Victor Harbour wrote this little song;

All around Australia, Aborigines once roamed

In this land that was so peaceful



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In this land they called their home.

With his dingo close beside him as he hunted day by day

He could not foresee the future that would one day change his way.

And someday there are songs that we shall sing,

Someday there are joys that shall unfold,

Someday Black & White will harmonise,

And we'll sing the greatest Story ever told,

Yes we'll sing the greatest Story ever told

This is God's story, a story bringing First and Second Peoples together, to walk, talk and work together, overcoming the reasons that there is division and inequality and that God's Story is announcing a new message and a new journey of hope through his Son Jesus.

Mark Kickett is a Noongar man from the south west of Western Australia.

Mark was ordained into the ministry of the Baptist Church in the early 1990's. He has ministered in churches in Brisbane, Perth and Broken Hill, and has also worked in government and community services in both Broken Hill and Perth.

Recently he was pastor for 4 years to a small Ngarrindjeri community – Kalparrin - just outside of Murray Bridge, as well as being State Development Officer for the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in South Australia.

The Congress has ministry in SA also in Adelaide (at Salisbury), Raukkan, Port Augusta and Oodnadatta. In April Mark was appointed Congress National Interim Chair, a position he will hold until the next national Conference of the UAICC, which will be in 2021.

Mark is a father of five adult children. He is passionate about sharing the gospel story, reconciliation issues, and empowering young Aboriginal people to grow in their faith and leadership skills.



NATIONAL SORRY DAY

National Sorry Day is held on 26 May each year – the day before National Reconciliation Week.

It is a day to acknowledge and recognise members of the Stolen Generations.

The theme this year is **“For the mothers and children”**.

The day falls on the anniversary of the ‘Bringing Them Home’ Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which was tabled into the Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997.

The inquiry was primarily conducted by commissioners Sir Ronald Wilson, former President of the Uniting Church, and the then President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and Mick Dodson, a Yawuru Man and the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.

Indigenous women were also appointed as co-commissioners, to provide support to the people who gave evidence in each region the inquiry visited. They were: Annette Peardon, Marjorie Thorpe, Dr Maryanne Bin Salik, Sadie Canning, Olive Knight, Kathy Mills, Anne Louis, Laurel Williams, Jackie Huggins, Josephine Ptero-David and Professor Marcia Langton. The co-commissioners also assisted in the development of the report and its recommendations.



Lorna Standingready (Canadian First Nations Elder) with Mona Olsson and Rev Denise Champion of UAICC SA at Colebrook Memorial for Stolen Generations, Adelaide, Mar 2018.



DR DEIDRE PALMER – SORRY DAY REFLECTION

As a mother, I cannot imagine having to bear the heartbreaking grief of having my child taken away from me.

As a daughter, I cannot imagine being removed from my mother and never seeing her again.

I have listened to the stories of women and men, who are part of the Stolen Generation, and who continue to live with the trauma of their removal from family, land, culture and spiritual connection.

I lament that as a Church we supported their removal, as part of a government policy, that lacked understanding, compassion and respect for First Peoples and undermined their culture and ability to determine their own lives and flourishing.

As the Uniting Church, we are truly sorry for the ways we have contributed to the trauma and loss experienced by the First Peoples of this land, and to the wounding and scarring of our life together.

The evidence of our sorry needs to be seen in our actions – in our truth telling, in our advocacy for justice for First Peoples, in our deepening of relationships between First and Second Peoples and our shaping of new communities of mutuality, equity, dignity, respect and healing.

We stand in solidarity with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress of the Uniting Church and reiterate the words spoken by President Jill Tabart in 1994:

“We seek to journey together in the true spirit of Christ as we discover what it means to be bound to one another in a covenant.”

The Uniting Church in Australia supports the remembrance, through the National Sorry Day, of this sad and traumatic chapter in the history of this nation. It is deeply concerning that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still being removed from their families in alarming numbers and we are committed to advocate for an end to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the foster care system and promoting Aboriginal-led responses.

In 1996 the Assembly Standing Committee of the Uniting Church made an [‘Acknowledgement and Apology’](#) to the ‘Aboriginal Community’ for family separation practices and the Church’s part in it.

Then at the full National Assembly meeting in 1997 this ‘Acknowledgement and Apology’ was affirmed in the [‘Stolen Generation’](#) resolution, committing and encouraging the whole Uniting Church to support the recommendations of the Inquiry.



Alison Overeem of UAICC Tasmania (second from right) with Grace and Ayla Williams and Northern Synod Moderator Rev Thresi Mauboy, Nov 2019.

REFLECTION

Alison Overeem, UAICC Tasmania, Leprena Centre in Glenorchy

What does it mean to be “Sorry” through a cultural lens?

As we reach the anniversary of Sorry Day we must trust we know what lies within the essence of being sorry

Sorry for heartache

Sorry for intergenerational trauma

Sorry for forced removals from a mother’s arms

Sorry for the deep disconnection from self

Sorry for the loss of growing up strong in culture and community

Sorry for the generations stolen

Of connections stolen

Of identity stolen

Sorry for years of healing and trauma and a search for connection and a cultural compass

We must see that this is not something that happened and stopped

It’s transient across generations in our trauma and search for healing

It was and is a taking away



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A taking away from all that defines us as First People

In Tasmania we endured whole removals, stolen children, stolen families, stolen connections

Missing pieces in our spirituality and identity

Missing pieces in struggle and sense of self

Saying sorry means that we commit to not allowing this to continue to happen for ATSI children

Saying sorry means advocating for systemic change now, for additional resources to keep children and families protected but connected

My takila (heart) weeps for the mothers whose children were taken from their arms, for the children who yearned for their arms, for the children who endured abuse at the colonial hands of removal

When we say sorry, we must honour all these stories of the past, but we must know that they are still happening in the lives and hearts of so many

Keeping children connected to culture and community is the essence of whom we are as First people

When we say sorry

May we commit to change now

So, we do not continue to see even more stolen generations of ATSI children

May we commit to honouring and upholding the cultural compass every ATSI child needs and yearns for

ACTIVITY – “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SORRY?”

Listening deeply is a first step towards Reconciliation between First and Second Peoples in Australia. Pilgrim Theological College in Melbourne is partnering with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to honour National Sorry Day 2020.

On your phone or device record a short message to camera, answering the questions: What does Sorry Day mean to you? What does it mean to be sorry?

Upload your video (30 – 45 seconds) to m.me/PilgrimTheologicalCollege or <https://bit.ly/2Z1GTvH> or send your written reflection to info@pilgrim.edu.au

Your reflection will be available with other resources and responses at the Assembly learning platform: <https://unitinglearning.org.au/course/view.php?id=116>

REDRESS

[UCA Redress Ltd](#) was established by the Uniting Church in Australia, to respond to the needs of survivors. In a Reconciliation Statement it is developing the Board says that UCA Redress Ltd acknowledges the Covenant between the Church and its First Nations members.

The [Covenanting Statement](#), read by the President of the Uniting Church in 1994, states in part:

“We lament that our people took your land from you as if it were land belonging to nobody, and often responded with great violence to the resistance of your people; our people took from you your means of livelihood, and desecrated many sacred places.”

“By providing foster-homes for Aboriginal children, our churches in reality lent their support to the government practice of taking children from their mothers and families, causing great suffering and loss of cultural identity.”

“We seek to journey together in the true spirit of Christ as we discover what it means to be bound to one another in a covenant.”

The generous response from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to this statement, reads in part:

“We come to this covenanting table with our gifts of Aboriginal spirituality, our culture, our Aboriginal way of loving and caring, our instinctive concern and a willingness to share and teach our history and every good aspect about being Aboriginal and Islander.”

“We pray that God will guide you, together with us, in developing a covenant to walk together practically so that the words of your statement may become a tangible expression of His justice and love for all creation. We ask you to remember this covenant by remembering that our land is now sustaining your people by God’s grace.”

UCA Redress Ltd is committed to supporting survivors of abuse in a culturally safe and informed way, that acknowledges particular vulnerabilities, the ongoing impact of abuse on people’s lives and the deep pain that comes from those experiences for survivors, families and communities.

We will:

- Seek out the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making about redress
- Pursue diverse pathways and options for people to access redress and have a range of responses available
- Seek out opportunities to engage with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress on matters relating to redress
- Proactively seek out opportunities for reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors of abuse, their families and communities.

WALK FOR RECONCILIATION – TWENTY YEARS ON



In the year 2000, Australians in unprecedented numbers (approximately 250,000) gathered on the Harbour Bridge in Sydney, First and Second Peoples, walking together in solidarity for justice for First Peoples and reconciliation in our nation. The occasion was the fifth National Reconciliation Week, with the theme of Corroboree 2000 – Sharing Our Future.

Rev Dr Djinyini Gondarra OAM was one of the leaders, at the time a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, who had organised the march. A strong motivation for the march was the 'Bringing Them Home' Report and the then Prime Minister Howard's refusal to say 'sorry'.

A week later, about 60,000 people walked together across the William Jolly Bridge in Brisbane. Scores of smaller walks followed throughout the country, in state capitals and regional towns, culminating in big marches in Melbourne and Perth at the end of the year.

The Melbourne walk, starting at Flinders Street Station and finishing at Kings Domain gardens, drew as many as 300,000 people.

The nation came together as never before. In our remembering this National Sorry Day we honour those who were removed from their families, we acknowledge the trauma and the generational legacies of that trauma experienced by individuals, families and communities. We say again how deeply sorry we are for our part in this tragedy and commit to being a community where healing and reconciliation, together with human dignity, can flourish.

RECONCILIATION SUNDAY RESOURCE – 31 MAY 2020

This year the Assembly Resourcing Unit is recommending the [Reconciliation Sunday Resource](#) prepared by the Synod of South Australia. Our thanks to Tarlee Leondaris, the South Australian Synod Covenanting Officer together with other leaders who prepared this resource.

Please feel free to adapt it to your circumstance and location. You may use all or any part of the resource as is appropriate in your situation. Please acknowledge those who have produced it.

The resource includes a suggested Order of Service for Sunday 31 May, a list of Covenanting and Reconciliation resources, and five-page supplement of intergenerational ideas for adapting the resource.

The SA Synod and UAICC have joined with Adelaide's Pilgrim Uniting Church to offer a 52-minute prerecorded service for Reconciliation Sunday on [YouTube](#). The service features Tarlee Leondaris, Covenanting Officer at SA Synod, and Chelsea Size, Training and Formation Coordinator, UAICCC SA, as well as members of the SA Covenanting Committee and Pilgrim Uniting Church.

GIVING

With only a few congregations meeting face-to-face due to COVID-19 restrictions, please consider a personal donation for UAICC Youth Ministry during National Reconciliation Week 2020.

A donation for UAICC Youth Ministry will give young Indigenous people in the Uniting Church opportunities for formation and development.

In the past, the UCA has funded young First Peoples to attend ecumenical gatherings in Australia, the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.

With your support we will continue to extend these and local development opportunities.

Please use the banking details below and enter the transaction description as 'Congress'

Account name: Donation Spare Account

Bank name: Westpac

BSB: 032014

Account number: 920592

SWIFT code: WPACAU2SXXX (only needed for deposits from an overseas bank account)



UAICC young leader Sean Weetra serves Holy Communion at the National Young Adult Leaders Conference in Adelaide, Jan 2019.



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SOCIAL MEDIA – IN THIS TOGETHER

From 27 May to 3 June, Uniting Church in Australia social media accounts will share a number of National Reconciliation Week themed posts using the official hashtags **#NRW2020** and **#InThisTogether2020**

We will be sharing a number of posts from the Uniting Church Action for Society and Environment Group (UCASE), a social justice group from Uniting Churches in Beecroft, Eastwood, Epping and West Epping in Sydney's north.

UCASE has set up a public [Facebook group](#) and will be sharing video and other interviews with UAICC members Alison Overeem and Mark Kickett, National Consultant Covenanting Stuart McMillan, a Church member who took part in the Walk for Reconciliation in 2000 and others.

The posts will also be shared to the Assembly's Walking Together as First and Second Peoples Circle [Facebook group](#). If you're not a member, you're very [welcome to join](#).

CONTACT

For more information about the Covenant, Walking Together as First and Second Peoples and Sovereignty:

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