

Worship Resources for Reconciliation Sunday

Easter 6 May 29, 2011

Dear colleagues in Ministry,

Reconciliation Sunday in the last week of May gives us the opportunity to celebrate one of the major themes of our Christian faith and to do so in collaboration with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters with whom we share that faith and this country.

The Presbytery and Synod of SA agreed in November 2006 to “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.” (P06.11)

At the Presbytery Synod AGM last year it was decided to adopt the national Lent Event program. Therefore it was decided that the Presbytery and Synod of SA would :

APPROVE an annual appeal for a Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) project in South Australia during Reconciliation Week (May 2011) to replace the UAICC component which is part of the current SA Lenten Appeal.

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It was determined to centre this appeal on Reconciliation Sunday. In planning worship for this day congregations are asked to take up a special collection or have a retiring offering for the UAICC Project in SA. Details & poster will have been circulated in the mail. ***Please make your congregation aware of this appeal before Reconciliation Sunday and support this appeal.***

This is the fifth year that we have prepared worship resources for use on Reconciliation Sunday. Some of the resources we produced in previous years have been used to produce this resource. Please refer to these resources for additional information. They may be downloaded from the Mission Resourcing Network Website. Go to Covenanting and click on Reconciliation Sunday.

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

Please feel free to use all or part of these resources in planning worship for this day or they may be used later during NAIDOC week celebrations if this fits in better with your worship planning.

The resources include:

1. A complete order of service
2. Suggested hymns
3. Some material for consideration when sermon writing
4. General information on the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and Covenanting
5. Suggestions for Parents or Playgroups and a Children's Story

Denise Champion	Covenanting Coordinator & Co-chair Covenanting Committee
Rev Phil Hoffmann	Member, Covenanting Committee, Minister Rosefield Uniting Church
Peter Russell,	Secretary, Covenanting Committee
Andrew Clarke	Member, Covenanting Committee
Dr Di Russell	Covenanter

Order of Service for Reconciliation Sunday, 29 May, 2011

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)

Decorate your communion table with some branches from a gum tree. 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 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.

The Uniting Church and the Synod of South Australia is on a journey of reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians.

We believe that restoring human relationships is part of God's reconciling mission in our world.

Through forgiveness, God's grace works to provide all with hope and a new way of living. This journey of reconciliation is a response to the Bible's call to care for all people including the marginalised and vulnerable.

Greeting:

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

Call to worship:

Faithful God,
In this worship time,
may we hear what you want us to hear,
that we might be who you want us to be,
in order to do what you want us to do.

In Jesus name. AMEN

Welcome to Country:

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

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

or

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

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

or

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

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

Hymn: Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand TIS 188

Where wide sky rolls down and touches red sand,
where sun turns to gold the grass of the land,
let spinifex, mulga and waterhole tell
their joy in the One who made everything well.

Where rain-forest calm meets reef, tide and storm,
where green things grow lush and oceans are warm,
let every sea-creature and tropical bird
exult in the light of the life-giving Word.

Where red gum and creek cross hillside and plain,
where cool tree-ferns rise to welcome the rain,
let bushland, farm, mountain-top, all of their days
delight in the Spirit who formed them for praise.

Now, people of faith, come gather around
with songs to be shared, for blessings abound!
Australians, whatever your culture or race,
come, lift up your hearts to the Giver of grace. *EJSmith*

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession:

God who is present in all places and in all times.

When we look at the stars, we are looking at light that has guided your Aboriginal people from time immemorial.

When we drive through Australia's plains, hills and valleys, we are often travelling on routes that have been known for longer than European history.

We give thanks for the richness of the environment in Australia, and acknowledge those who have cared for it throughout time.

We give thanks that often we receive the full benefits of Australian citizenship, without stopping to consider those who are on the margins of society, and not receiving all these benefits.

And yet we know that this is not the full story of what has happened here.

We express our sorrow that our forefathers did not understand the Aboriginal culture that was in many places destroyed as a consequence of pioneer settlement.

We confess that we do not know our Aboriginal brothers and sisters and often do not understand the circumstances that have created many of their difficulties and problems.

We confess that often problems seem too big for us to tackle and too often, it is simpler to walk past on the other side of the road.

We confess that too often, we assume our way of looking at things is the only way. Forgive us those times we have failed to listen, or not tried to understand those who are different to us.

Andrew Clarke

Friends, hear once again the promise of the Christian faith:

The gift of life is to be embraced and shared.

In the love of Christ we have our peace
and we have our healing.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

The absolution comes from Sean Gilbert

Children's Address: The Story of Friederike Meyer (see below)

Hymn: You were in this place

All Together Whatever (CD and Book) Words and music: Robin Mann © 1987

see background notes

1. At the dawn of the ages
you pulled land from the sea.
With your word you invented
all we know, all we see:
creek and desert and forest,

red and grey kangaroo.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

2. Paintings seen on the rock face,
footprints left in the sand,
campfire next to the river,
songs that rise from the land:
signs that seem so elusive,
shadows just out of view.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

3. Do we take after Jacob,
blind to what lies at hand,
needing dreams to inform us
God is here in this land?
See him suffering and dying,
bread and wine tell the news.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

4. Jesus, open our senses,
help us see you today
in the person beside us,
as we work, as we play.
While we love you and serve you,
may it never be true:
you were in this place—
but we never knew.

Scripture readings:

Acts 17:22-31

Ps 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

Witness: see sermon notes below

Hymn: Lord of earth and all creation TIS 672

1. Lord of earth and all creation,
Let your love possess our land:
Wealth, and freedom, far horizons,
Mountain, forest, shining sand:
May we share, in faith and friendship,
Gifts unmeasured from your hand.
2. People of the ancient Dreamtime,
They who found this country first,
Ask with those, the later comers,
Will our dream be blessed or cursed?
Grant us, Lord, new birth, new living,
Hope for which our children thirst.

3. Lord, life-giving healing Spirit,
On our hurts your mercy shower;
Lead us by your inward dwelling,
Guiding, guarding, every hour.
Bless and keep our land Australia:
In your will her peace and power.

Words, Mr Thwaites, music R Boughen

Intercessory Prayers:

Lord, you meet us in unexpected places and people.
Help us to be alert to meet you,
that you may heal our wounds,
and make us ready to serve
in the needs of our neighbours

Where you are hungry and homeless,
help us to be your loving people,
giving food and shelter:
Help us to be alert to meet you.

Where you are imprisoned or oppressed,
help us to be your liberated people,
giving comfort and help
Help us to be alert to meet you

Where you are anxious and despairing,
help us to be your concerned people,
sharing understanding, hope and encouragement:
Help us to be alert to meet you.

Where you are striving to celebrate,
help us to share your joy,
particularly where there seems no reason for happiness:
Help us to be alert to meet you.

Where you are sick and dying,
help us to be your consoling people,
standing at your side offering support:
Help us to be alert to meet you.

Where you are in need of a friend
help us to stand by your side
prepared to stay with you, until your needs are met:
Help us to be alert to meet you.

Ever living and ever loving God,
be the with us in our service for others
now and for ever.

Adapted from Bruce Prewer "Australian Prayers" Open Book

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. **In South Australia please support the Uniting Church in SA in partnership with the UAICC Special Project Appeal – A Pilgrimage of Healing.**

Prayer of Dedication:

Let us pray:

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

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

Amen.

(adapted from the liturgy provided to the churches in 2008 following the Prime Minister's apology to the stolen generations,)

Hymn: Deep Stillness

'All Together Whatever' also 'Let's Sing it Again', CD & Book)

Words: Julie Perrin, music: Robin Mann © 1997 see background notes

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland
For you, deep blue of the desert skies
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones
For you, sweet water from hidden springs.
From the edges seek the heartlands
and when you're burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit
soothe and replenish you.
In the name of Christ,
In the name of Christ
(repeat - last time, sing 'in the name of Christ' 3 times)

Words of Mission:

Go with us God in all that builds community.

Go with us Christ in all that breaks down barriers.

God with us Spirit in all that reconciles. **Amen!**

From Singing while it is still dark p. 98 (Susan Wickham)

Other resources

For Children, Parents & Playgroups for Reconciliation Week

At Home

Reconciliation Week is a time to build mutually respectful relationships between Aboriginal and other Australians. Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal 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.

Notes on Hymns & songs

HYMN: You Were In This Place

© 1987 Words and music: Robin Mann, *All Together Whatever* CD and Book, used with permission. An Australia Day service is organised each year in the city of Adelaide. For the 200th anniversary of white settlement, repentance was as much in mind as celebration. The story of Jacob's dream at Bethel (the original stairway to heaven!) was central in the service. This song rose out of that story, and especially from Jacob's statement when he wakes up from his dream: "God is in this place, and I didn't know it!"

For You, Deep Stillness of the Silent Inland

(All Together Whatever also in 'Let's Sing it Again CD & Book)
© 1997 Robin Mann. Words: Julie Perrin (from Robin Mann, *Altogether Again, Open Book used with permission* 1997. A Christmas card from Warren and Lorraine Bartlett contained this adapted Celtic (or Gaelic) Blessing. Warren was at that time moderator of the Uniting Church in Victoria, and this blessing had been written for the annual synod of their church. Julie Perrin, a storyteller, had written the words — or rather, she says, 'they were just waiting to be written down'. The song is made really complete with a series of movements devised by Ian Ferguson. (see below)
What a great world you've made. Thanks for this country, Australia. May we be reminded of your presence by whatever we see and feel and hear.

Movements by Ian Ferguson

"For you", Each time these words are sung we extend our arms and hands forward and out in a sweeping gesture of openness and offering

"deep stillness of the silent inland" We gently bring our hands in to cradle our belly feeling space and stillness in that place — the heart of our land resounds in the centre of our bodies. We offer that feeling.

"For you, deep blue of the desert skies" With our extended arms we trace the arch of the sky and lift our faces to the sky, bathing ourselves in the depth and immensity of it — and we offer that feeling.

"For you, flame red of the rocks and stones" We clap on 'red', then form one fist on 'rocks', followed by another on 'stones'. We hold our fists together close in front of us, feeling the bite of the flame and the strength of the rock — and we offer that.

"For you, sweet water from hidden springs." We form a cup with our hands, scoop that water in front of us, then, with a pouring/flowing/circling action we bring our hands to our chest and then to our sides, letting the water flood into our hearts and out to wash over those around us.

"From the edges seek the heartlands" We join our hands with those on either side of us and bring our right hand holding our neighbour's left up to our hearts.

"and when you're burnt by the journey" Still holding hands we swing our arms down and let our heads hang in a relaxed motion.

"may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit" We raise our heads and swing our arms high above our heads, releasing hands as we reach the top.

"soothe and replenish you." We lower our arms slowly down in front of us with a wavelike motion in a gesture of peace.

"In the name of Christ," We cross one arm over our chest.

"In the name of Christ" We bring the other arm to join the first and bow our heads with arms crossed over our chests before beginning again on 'for you' with a sweeping gesture of open offering.

Some Sermon Notes

Phil Hoffmann

Thinking today about Reconciliation: MATTHEW 5: 23 - 25

This teaching of Jesus as part of the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount' gives a mandate for reconciliation in the community of disciples.

We have individualized this text to limit it to people with whom we might be in conflict, those we may have spoken to in anger or against in gossip.

But the early communities of faith understood and lived such matters corporately. Clan and family were all-important. So it is likely that at root here are divisions between groups of people.

We would do well then to reflect upon this passage in relation to our Aboriginal sisters and brothers.

- ❖ When we come to worship, is our gift to God lessened or demeaned by our failure to live in harmony with Aboriginal people?
- ❖ Are there things we should set right before we approach the mercy seat of God?
- ❖ Would this reconciliation deepen and enliven our language about faith and worship of the God of compassion?

From the lectionary: ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 17: 16 – 34

There is a practical, almost missional bent to how this story is told.

Paul is a little more conciliatory than the narrator. He is prepared to acknowledge 'how religious' the Athenians are and wander amongst their statued idols, reading the inscriptions. In these comments Paul is offering compliments rather than seeking conflict. This proliferation of idols inwardly distresses him, but amidst it all, Paul sees opportunity for faith. So he declares that he will tell them what they should already know! In fact, he says, whilst walking amongst their idols, he has witnessed worship to an 'unknown god'.

Paul has gone to the local town place of public debate and joined in! He hasn't established 'The Corner Church of St Paul the Evangelist' and distributed flyers saying "Come and Hear the latest". He has entered the Athenians' places of encounter and engaged.

This is not the approach of most early missionaries. As Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra says: [see the section about 'totems' italicised in excerpts from his article 'Father, you gave us the Dreaming']

Paul's discussion in the market place appears to have been a cordial one. The word used in the text (verse 18) is *symballo*, 'a collegial exchange toward a constructive end' [Robert W Wall in "The New Interpreter's Bible"]. Is this suggestive of a mission strategy that seeks an exchange to find common ground rather than 'argue them into the ground'?

Earlier in the record of the early church in Acts of the Apostles Paul remind his hearers that 'in no time or place has God ever been without a witness' [Acts 14:17]. God's life and activity are evident in the very rain which falls on crops. From creation, through the message of the prophets to full expression

in Jesus, God has always been alive in the people of all nations. How do we relate this understanding to presence of God amongst Aboriginal cultures prior to the arrival of white settlement after 1788?

This requires understanding of theology in different cultural contexts. For example, [see paragraphs 1-3 of the article 'Father, you gave us the Dreaming' by Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra].

Do we too readily assume that those to whom we seek to proclaim good news today are one-dimensional and single-minded in their non-faith stance?

Rather than make a claim to absolute truth and 'knowing', Paul's defence is introduction of a significant person and his actions, a person who remains unnamed here, but surely can be known – Jesus. Paul argues, in effect, that he can tell them about the god who remains 'unknown'. This God is beyond philosophical discussion. The creator God has no need of the work of human hands. In fact, we are the offspring of God; we are dependent upon God's goodness, not God upon ours! God has established the nations of the earth – all of them. The outworking of history is in the mind of God. And now that God has acted decisively to judge the world, "by the man he has appointed", who has demonstrated this "by raising him from the dead." Christ's resurrection is both the ideological and personal key to unlocking an understanding of God. So, Paul infers, 'forget the rest!' The judgement and repentance on offer are the stuff of relationship with God, not shrines, foods, customs and ritual!

In his article "Father, you gave us the Dreaming" [attached – see paragraphs 4-6] Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra acknowledges that learning about Jesus adds to the Aboriginal understanding of God and requires some changes. A "Christian responsibility given by God" exists in to "sort things out...what ceremonies and rituals do not need to be practised and what should be practised, which then becomes part of Aboriginal Christianity".

We would do well to acknowledge with Djiniyini that this same call exists in contemporary Australian culture, its competitiveness and consumerism. There is a caution here about being judgemental of other cultures and their practices in favour of attention to our own 'cultural baggage'. Reconciliation requires that we recognise what is in us requiring attention as we seek to find common ground in faith with Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

Paul's proclamation here meets the essential hopes of each of the groups named in his audience; the Epicureans and the Stoics. God is now neither distant ("not far from each of us") nor unreachable ("those who seek God will find him"). Human life is breathed by God. He crafts a description of God that leaves his listeners neither able to dismiss God as removed nor as controlled and contained by human thought and affairs. This is a God both mysterious and elevated, yet at the same time, personal and intimate. In God's dealings with humankind, it is we who remain accountable, not God to us.

Here is the story of the early church's clearest example of theology in context.

We need to note both the form and the content of Paul's message on Mars Hill. He comes alongside, affirming and drawing the best out of local culture and thought and then emphatically speaks into it of the God made known in Christ.

We see this in the example of Heinrich and Friederike Meyer in the resource provided for the Children [see attached]. In their 1840s devotion to work amongst the local Aboriginal people around what is today known as Victor Harbor, South Australia, the Meyers entered the local Ngarrindjeri customs and applied themselves to learning their language. This was in a time and place where native languages were being overlooked or even dismissed. The Meyers' legacy was a 1600 store of words that has today ensured the survival of Ngarrindjeri language.

Righteousness does not lie in the outward forms of our faith, but in acceptance of new opportunities made ours in Jesus' offer of forgiveness and hope. In Jesus God both judges and restores our living. And all of us, not only 'the others' who have need.

As we might well anticipate, Paul's statement before the city leaders received mixed response; some dismiss it with sneers, some are curious to understand more, some receive the message and join as followers.

This preaching encounter is reminiscent of the story of the missionaries who ventured far into the ocean and there discovered an as yet undiscovered tribe. They were welcomed by elders, who after providing them with a sumptuous local banquet of fruits and nuts listened to the good news the missionaries carried with them. After they had finished speaking, the chief drew a long breath and said to the missionaries, "Thank you. You have told us what we always knew but had never until now been able to put into words."

God does not inhabit our ways, our traditions and religious practices. God has not needed to wait for us to formulate faith and doctrine for God to be known. Could God be sensed and reached before the great Councils of the Church met in the early ages? Before the creeds of the church were defined? God is not tied to our language and expression.

The Church does well when it finds words and sacrament to name and make real the God who was always there. That God has had fullest revelation in the person of Jesus and Jesus giving for human life.

Paul's missionary practice in Athens asks no more than that which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of our land requested in changes to the Preamble of the Constitution of the Uniting Church. Those changes in effect say, "Please recognize that God was present and active in our midst before the boats and their message came ashore". God has sustained the life of the First Peoples. The Uniting Church has now recognized that "The Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony".

Like Paul before the Aeropagus, now is the opportunity for us to recognize together that Jesus has made God near and known to all people. The rest, including some of the doctrines, practices and behaviours that we hold dear, is mere detail.

At the Adelaide preview of the provocative film "Our Generation", Rev Dr Djinyini Gondarra was asked by the audience afterwards, 'How can we, as white Australians, as beneficiaries of this injustice, contribute to redressing it?' His single response was to say, "Feel my pain." This empathy is the beginning of reconciliation; to enter another person's story and feel what they experience in it with them.

Chris Budden in his book, "Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land" [Pickwick Publications, Oregon 2009] describes three "movements in Australia that are concerned to reassess and change relationships between First and Second peoples": reconciliation, covenant, and treaty. As example of Covenant, he notes that which exists within the Uniting Church between the Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Conference (UAICC) [pages 153 – 157]. Whilst many Australians of European descent resist any notion of complicity in the injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal people in our history, we must all accept that we are beneficiaries of that legacy. This is no bad thing; there is much to be celebrated in who we are as a nation today, but we stunt that national goodness where we limit or deny its lesser aspects.

Budden poses a set of three theological issues in the discussion of relations with Aboriginal Australians:

- What is the proper relationship between reconciliation and justice?
- Should people not simply forget the issues from the past, offer forgiveness and move on?

- Are present relationships simply the result of misunderstanding, or is there real wrongdoing in this situation?
- How do Second peoples approach these issues when they are the offending party and not the ones who can forgive or decide what reconciliation should look like?

[Budden, page 157]

Prayer for the Journey of Healing

**God of our ancient people,
lover of all tribes,
show those of us who are
more recent arrivals
in this great south land
how best we can allow Indigenous Australians
to recover their dignity
and to make their rich contribution
to the wellbeing of our growing nation.**

**Thank you for those in government
and in the church community
who are really listening
and responding with true wisdom
to their needs and cries.
Thank you for the land rights that have been recognised,
for progress among tribal groups,
for emerging Indigenous poets,
priests, ministers and managers.**

**We pray with anguished souls
for the descendants of tribes
disinherited long ago,
for those broken spirits
who gather without aim or hope
in parks and lanes of cities and towns.
God, guide us,
for we feel incapable of discovering
how we can best assist them -
except that perhaps to admit to them
that we are burdened to belong
to the race that helped corrupt them.**

**Merciful God, hear our cry.
Many of us long to undo
the many wrongs,
as far as is possible.
But how do we start, God?
Where do we start?
Merciful God, hear our cry!**

Bruce Prewer - Australian Prayers (used by permission)

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

by

Rev. Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra†

in

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

EXCERPTS FROM THIS ARTICLE

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

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

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

Is the God of the Bible active in Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal dreamtime? This is the question that is asked by the Christian churches today. Aboriginal Christians are convinced and believe that the God of the Bible was with us and our people in the dreamtime. He was very active in our history. He has come to us in many different ways and many different forms to reveal his presence. He spoke to us through his creation, the beauty of the nature that clothes itself in God's glory that convinced us and made us believe that he is also the God of the Aboriginal race in Australia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apology to the stolen generations

February 13, 2008 Here is the full text of Australia's apology to the stolen generations, to be read by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in parliament at 9am.

"Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations - this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia."

Preamble to the UCA Constitution

UCA first church in Australia to officially acknowledge Aboriginal and Islander peoples as first peoples of Australia

- Friday, 26 November 2010 13:12

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.

“As a church we entered into an agreement with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to foster more just, inclusive and equal relationships in the Church that recognise the place of First Peoples,” Rev Macrae said.

“We have worked closely with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in developing the preamble and we are proud that, as a church, we have chosen to take this important step,” he said.

“It gives us a bigger and deeper understanding of who we are as an Australian church. First and second peoples belong equally together in this great land. Hopefully this new acknowledgment might provide a strong basis to work for greater understanding, reconciliation and justice.”

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.”

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/news-media/news/assembly-news-2010/uca-first-church-in-australia-to-officially-acknowledge-aboriginal-and-islander-peoples-as-first-peoples-of-australia>

Text of the Preamble

THE REVISED PREAMBLE TO CONSTITUTION

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.

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/assembly-update/revised-preamble>

-ooOoo-

Some quotes -

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.

Reconciliation requires mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. In my view, this is best developed in practice through cooperation on projects of joint benefit at local and regional level.

Ray Martin

Presenter , A Current Affair, Channel Nine; Member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in The Weekend Australian August 1994.

A Children's Story

From Berlin to Encounter Bay

The story of Friederike Meyer

You have probably heard stories, especially fairy stories, about people who began life being very poor but ended up living life in luxury, sometimes in a castle. Do you know any stories like that? [children may respond with Cinderella, or other]

Today we have a story which is a bit like that, but the other way.

Let's take a trip back in time to a German castle in the 1830s in a part of Germany called Prussia. It's a very rich and splendid castle – lots of gold and carpets and paintings - and in German it's called a "schloss" [...can you say that? "Schloss."]

This schloss is the home of some royal people: Prince Charles and Princess Maria of Prussia. In this castle, there is a lady called Friederike who has worked there for eleven years, and she has been a lady in waiting to Princess Maria. Friederike sees all the beautiful things in the palace every day, and she has to make sure that the clothes and food and cups of tea for the Princess are all just right. Imagine working in a castle like that!

BUT - everything is about to change for Friederike. She's engaged and about to get married to a man called Heinrich Eduard Meyer, who is going to sail in a ship to South Australia soon, and they'll be going together as a newly married couple. They have been asked to go to Encounter Bay, where Victor Harbor is now, and their job is to spend time with the Aboriginal people of the Ngarrindjeri tribe there, and to get to know them and share God's good news with them.

We don't know how much Friederike knew about South Australia, but probably it wasn't very much. In 1840, when Friederike and Eduard (that's what most people called her new husband) arrived in SA by sailing ship, people tried to warn her about Encounter Bay, because it could be a dangerous place with clashes between the Aborigines and the whalers and sealers who lived there.

And South Australia then wasn't at all like South Australia is now. [Can you think of some of the things that would have been different? Fewer white settlers, escaped convicts and whalers and sealers, more Aboriginal people, lots more trees and scrub, no good roads, no hospitals or doctor's clinics, travel could only be by horse or by ship, no TV, phones, movies, computers or Facebook ...]

Well it really *was* different when they arrived in Encounter Bay. No palace now. Their new home was a little hut, the kind we call a "slab hut", with no glass in the windows, but Eduard wrote at the time, that he and Friederike were really happy just to have "a roof over their heads." Four years later they were able to move into a stone cottage and things were more comfortable for them, but they lost two of their babies during

these early years. Victor Harbor was a wild, frontier place at that time, with lots of whalers and sealers around. These rough men had mostly treated the Ngarrindjeri people who had lived for many centuries at Encounter Bay quite badly, and the Ngarrindjeri people were worried about what was happening to them and their way of life.

But it was different when Friederike arrived. The Ngarrindjeri people felt safe with Friederike and Eduard and quickly grew to love them. Eduard started a school for the children, and he learnt the Ngarrindjeri language and wrote it down. Friederike looked after Eduard and their growing family, and she made many friends among the Ngarrindjeri people.

But Friederike and Eduard were very poor – there wasn't much money to support the work they were doing.

“When their cat caught a bird, Mrs Meyer was often forced to pounce on the cat and retrieve the bird for themselves – which they plucked and ate for dinner... (see Meyer Letters 7th October 1845)” [Source: Dr Mary-Anne Gale, March 2011.]

Eventually, Eduard had no money to continue his work among the Ngarrindjeri people, and in 1848 he and Friederike moved to the Barossa Valley. They felt they had failed in their work, and they would have been surprised to know that the Ngarrindjeri language that Eduard wrote down has become the main way we know some of the words in Ngarrindjeri language today. In those days Ngarrindjeri was only spoken and the people did not know how to write it. This written record of their language is something very valuable that has been left to the Ngarrindjeri people.

Years later, after Eduard had died and Friederike Meyer had moved to Hahndorf, the Ngarrindjeri people continued to visit her there and they still loved her very much. The way she behaved toward the Aboriginal people was so kind and good that she is remembered as a wonderful Christian pioneer lady to this day, especially for how she conducted herself with the Ngarrindjeri people and for how she loved them even while her own life was hard.

There are a lot of things we can learn from people like Eduard and Friederike Meyer. They both followed where God had called them. Friederike was ready to go to a hard place – from a castle to a slab hut at Encounter Bay. It wasn't easy, it wasn't most people's idea of success, but it was the right way to be with Aboriginal people. The way she treated the Ngarrindjeri people with respect and love is why she is still remembered by them.

Some Information on the Congress

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

In South Australia (2011) the Congress (UAICC) has two congregations; Salisbury (Adelaide) and Port Augusta and two faith communities, Kalparrin (Murray Bridge) and Oodnadatta, and the Mobile Aboriginal Patrol (MAP - Flinders Ranges & northern SA in partnership with Frontier Services).

The UAICC:

- are Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia and are 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.

Aboriginal and Islander Christians from all over Australia, came 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. Congress is part of the Uniting Church, but Congress determines its own goals and objectives and decides its policies and priorities.

Congress desires 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.

Congress proclaims 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 Congress 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.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress is now the largest non-government Aboriginal 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.

A Congregational Covenant

Many Uniting Church congregations are seeking to strengthen their commitment to covenanting with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Aboriginal communities of Australia by making a formal statement.

Congress suggests that it is the journey with Aboriginal people which is most important – so Congress 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 Aboriginal people. This means that it is important that there is an educational process for the congregation and a process of developing relationships with local/regional Congress folk and the local/regional Aboriginal community. Any statement needs to be the outcome of negotiations with Aboriginal 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 Aboriginal people.
- **Understanding** our place in Australia.
- Recognition of traditional **Aboriginal 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: dchampion@sa.uca.org.au**

“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

References

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 E: idempster@sa.uca.org.au

UAICC Websites

National: <http://www.uaicc.org.au/> note: South Australian data is not up to date (March 2011)

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

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

Acknowledgements

Material has been sourced from:

The Covenanting Website of the Uniting Church SA

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

Additional resources may become available from the website. Please return to check.

NATSIEC Website – Worship Liturgy

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

Week of Prayer for Reconciliation

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

Robin Mann

for permission to use words from the *All Together* Books published by Open Book and obtainable from Robin Mann directly through his web site at: <http://www.robinmann.com/>

Bruce Prewer

for permission to use prayers from *Australian Prayers* published by Open Book

Lyn Leane

for writing the children's story and for obtaining permission to use the research by Dr Mary-Ann Gale on the work of the Meyers at Encounter Bay.



The Uniting Church in South Australia
in partnership with the
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress



A Pilgrimage of Healing

We can make a difference



Reconciliation Week 27 May – 3 June 2011

Many of the Aboriginal people who connect with the Congress church at Salisbury stay in the Adelaide area to access health services. We are concerned that the numbers of indigenous people who need kidney dialysis treatment have dramatically increased.

Response:

Focus on Healthy Lifestyles

- Cooking classes and community education about the importance of good nutrition
- Fitness and exercise
- Establishing a bush tucker community garden at the Congress UC, Salisbury

How you can help:

- Pray for the Aboriginal people linked with the Uniting Church and the UAICC in SA.
- Become a partner church with a Congress congregation
- Organise a special offering on Reconciliation Sunday May 29th.
- Send donations to this initiative to
UAICC, PO Box 1044,
Salisbury, SA 5108

For more information:

Contact Denise Champion on 8236 4235 (wk) or see p. 18-19 of the

...MessageStick...

Summer 2010 edition at

www.uaicc.org.au/magazines/summer_2010

mission resourcing network

