



COVENANTING STATEMENT

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

*read by the Uniting Church President to the National Chairperson, Uniting
Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress*

We meet in the presence of God who through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God and to one another in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our unity “transcends cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries”. (Basis of Union, Paragraph 2). In this sharing of bread and wine we recall God’s gracious covenant with us and the whole creation, and anticipate the joyful celebration of the fulfilment of God’s rule of love and justice among us. In the meantime, as people who share in this covenant, we are called to carry out faithfully Christ’s command to love one another and to order our life in the church in truth and justice. We who are non-aboriginal members of the Seventh Assembly, representing all members of the Church, make this covenanting statement.

Long before my people came to this land your people were here. You were nurtured by your traditions, by the land, and by the Mystery that surrounds us all and binds all creation together.

My people did not hear you when you shared your understanding and your Dreaming. In our zeal to share with you the Good News of Jesus Christ, we were closed to your spirituality and your wisdom.

In recent years we non-Aboriginal members of the Uniting Church in Australia have had the privilege of journeying with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and with other Aboriginal people. We have become more aware of the sad impact that in earlier times the church and our culture had on your people.

So on the one hand, we give thanks with you for those of our people who have lived among your people bearing faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which brings hope and liberation to all. We give thanks to God who has empowered and encouraged your people to stand firm and exercise moral leadership throughout these two centuries.

But on the other hand, we who are non-Aboriginal members of our church grieve with you, our Aboriginal and Islander brothers and sisters. We grieve that the way in which our people often brought the Gospel to your people belittled and harmed much of your culture, and confused the Gospel with western ways. As a result you and we are the poorer and the image of God in us all is twisted and blurred, and we are not what God meant us to be.

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. Our justice system discriminated against you, and the high incarceration rate of your people and the number of Black deaths in custody show that the denial of justice continues today.

Your people were prevented from caring for this land as you believe God required of you, and our failure to care for the land appropriately has brought many problems for all of us.

We regret that our churches cooperated with governments in implementing racist and paternalistic policies. 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. Our churches cooperated with governments in moving people away from their land and resettling them in other places without their agreement.



I apologise on behalf of the Assembly for all those wrongs done knowingly or unknowingly to your people by the Church, and seek your forgiveness. I ask you to help us discover ways to make amends.

In 1988, the Heads of Churches called for a secure land base for dispossessed Aboriginal people, an assured place in the political process for Indigenous people and an openness to get to know one another and learn from each other's culture and values. We commit ourselves to those objectives.

We rejoice in the promotion of understanding and commitment to change engendered by the Reconciliation Process and the High Court's native title decision and subsequent Commonwealth legislation. In the words of the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, these changes presage: 'A New Partnership'.

We recognise, as was declared in the Assembly's 1988 Statement to the Nation, that the Australian people and this church continue to benefit from the injustices done to your people over the past two centuries. We believe it is right for the Uniting Church to make reparations to you for land taken from your people and used by the churches which became part of this church.

The Church has already made transfers of property to Aboriginal people in recognition of our history. At this meeting the Assembly will determine its response to the further specific request from the Congress for the transfer of a proportion of the Church's assets to the Congress as reparation and as a means of supporting the Congress in its mission and service programs.

In 1988 you invited us non-Aboriginal members of this church to enter a covenant with the members of the Congress. 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. Christ has bound us each to himself, giving himself for us, and he has bound us to each other with his commandment 'Love one another as I have loved you'.

It is our desire to work in solidarity with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress for the advancement of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness in this land, and we reaffirm the commitment made at the 1985 Assembly to do so. We want to bring discrimination to an end, so that your people are no longer gaoled in disproportionate numbers, and so that equal housing, health, education and employment opportunities are available for your people as for ours. To that end we commit ourselves to work with you towards national and state policy changes. We commit ourselves to build understanding between your people and ours in every locality, and to build relationships which respect the right of your people to self determination in the church and in the wider society.

We acknowledge that no matter how great our intentions however, we will not succeed in our efforts for reconciliation without Christ's redeeming grace and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit at work in both your people and ours.

I pray that this covenant will unite us in a multi-racial bond of fellowship which will be a witness to God's love for us all and a constant challenge to the continuing racism which oppresses you and separates us in this land. I pray that it will thus help us all to move towards a united Australia which respects this land in which we live, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all.