

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

COVENANT WITH UAICC

In 1994 the Uniting Church in Australia entered into a Covenant with its brothers and sisters in the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

The Uniting Church's 7th President Dr Jill Tabart formalised the relationship by reading the statement to UAICC Chairperson Pastor Bill Hollingsworth who responded on behalf of the Congress.

The documents were exchanged and the painting reproduced here was presented to the UCA by the UAICC.

Dr Tabart, UCA

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.

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.

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... 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.

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.

Pastor Hollingsworth, UAICC

Contrary to the belief of the invaders that they had a divine right to take possession of this land as their own, the God of righteousness, truth and justice has sustained us with the belief that one day we would be recognised as the true stewards of this land. This has come to pass through the High Court decision which was handed down in the Mabo case.

It is good and right that the church should repent of any of its actions in support of a policy that violently discriminated against and oppressed God's stewards of this land.

Because it is pleasing to God to love one another, and it is our commitment to do so, we invite you on behalf of Congress members to develop a new relationship by entering into the struggle of those issues that presently are the cause of continuing injustice resulting in broken relationships.

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 also sustaining your people by God's grace.



The Covenanting Painting:

This painting tells a sacred Creation story of the Wagalak sisters and speaks particularly of the alliance of four Clan Nations and their responsibilities for the land and waters of their yirralka (estates).

The painting also depicts the sacred ground where ceremonies take place and in particular the Wukindi ceremony, to restore relationship when blood is spilt and bring reconciliation.

The painting is in itself an initiation for UCA members to stand with members of the UAICC in their struggle for justice.

