

Resources for Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week 2008

Monday 26 May – National Sorry Day

Tuesday 27 May to 3 June – National Reconciliation Week

OUTLINES OF LITURGICAL MATERIAL SUITABLE FOR SERVICES FOR SORRY DAY and
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK

NB: The reference cited in this resource material, *Building Partnerships*, is a booklet subtitled, *A guide to covenant renewal with Indigenous people throughout the Uniting Church in Australia (2007)*. It is available online from the UCA National Assembly website at <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/news/partnerships> or in printed form on order from *MediaCom* on 1800 811 311.

The Gathering of the People of God

Weather and architecture permitting, the congregation may gather outside the place of worship, and use the first hymn/song as a processional.

The Christ candle (if applicable) may be lit in the midst of the proposed worship space or on the communion table.

Acknowledgement of land or welcome to country: *The worship leader or those gathered may say words such as:*

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, Elders past and present, on which we gather today. We recognize their special relationship with the land and all creation¹

If a local Indigenous Elder/representative is available, he/she might welcome people to the land.

Reconciliation begins in the immense love of God, who has continually reached out to reconcile the whole of creation with divine life. That life and that love arouse responses within all of us towards the strengthening of relationships that are healthy and the healing and renewal of relationships that are broken. We acknowledge the urgency for reconciliation between human creatures and the rest of creation, between humans and each other, and between humans and God.

Today we particularly seek God's way as we pray for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of this land, Australia, in all the diversity of cultures and localities. We pray for a building of mutual hope, trust and faith in God and each other - and for a binding together in covenant relationship before God with the first peoples of this country, based in mutual respect and care for the earth.

Greeting *(an appropriate local greeting)*

Call to worship:

Leader: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all;

All: *And also with you.*

¹ Page 10 of the booklet, *Building Partnerships*, offers 2 examples for local adaptation.

Hymn/song from *Together in Song* (No. 655), *O let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love*

Prayers²

Praise 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.

Praise God whose life-giving love calls us into relationship with one another, through Christ. We celebrate that unity which welcomes diversity as the gift of God.

Praise God whose rule of love and justice may be shared in our lives now, as we are bound together in God's covenant relationship with us, transcending cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries.

Leader: For times in our lives when we behave selfishly and greedily, grasping after things and achievements we think we have secured; but failing to respect one another or to pursue the common good,

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Forgive and restore us, we pray.

Leader: For weakly ignoring opportunities to advance better relationships; for times when we have nurtured racist attitudes or feared to rebuke unjust remarks,

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Forgive and restore us, we pray.

Leader: When we have failed to support positive action for reconciliation; or neglected to seek the truth. For lost opportunities to witness to your work in the world;

Lord, in your mercy,

All: Forgive and restore us, we pray.

When we are sorry for wrong things we have done; when we grieve at our own inaction, God forgives our sins and encourages us to new resolve in faith. We may, therefore, rejoice that our sins are forgiven; we can be glad a new day has begun,

Together: All praise and thanks to God our Redeemer and Sustainer, now and forever,

AMEN.

Hymn/Song: from *Together in Song* (No. 672), *Lord of earth and all creation, let your love possess our land*

The Service of the Word

² These prayers draw upon the 1994 UCA 7th Assembly Covenanting Statement and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) Response: <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/news/partnerships>

Choose one or more Scripture readings from the following options, based upon readings from the Revised Common Lectionary suggested for Sundays May 25 or June 1:

First reading: Isaiah 49: 8-16a or Genesis 6: 9-22; 7:24; 8:14-19

Psalms: 131 or 46

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 or Romans 1:16-17; 3: 22b-31

Gospel: Matthew 6:24-34 or Matthew 7:21-29

Preaching of the Word. *For this part of the service, worship leaders are encouraged to share the urgent imperative to work for reconciliation, and, if members of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), to remind the people of the Covenant signed with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in 1994. Material to help is available in the form of the booklet, "Building Partnerships" at: <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/news/partnerships>, or from MediaCom 1800 811 311.*

Leaders are invited to make use of the stories and materials in "Building Partnerships," and/or to share their own stories and activities in seeking reconciliation in Australia between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Working with the Gospel Readings (the following notes may be of use to worship leaders who wish to work with one of the following Gospel passages for Sorry Day or Reconciliation Week)

Matthew 6:24-34 - *When people rely on the pursuit of wealth, or what the world considers to be 'wealth' or 'success,' they can easily overlook their own deeper needs and those of people around them. Anxiety about the material needs of life, and greed for greater prosperity can be poisonous for living by faith in the essential goodness of creation. It is a sign of distrust in God. The message of Jesus in Matthew suggests that greedy concern for one's own survival, at the expense of others, is the very sin that increases suffering for all forms of life on this planet. However, there is a solution to the problems of selfish, acquisitive and anxious living. The solution is not "pie in the sky when you die;" that misleading cliché by which atheists have sought to win cheap points at the expense of believers. The solution to selfish, acquisitive and anxious living is given in verse 33: 'strive first the rule and justice of God' Our work is cut out for us, right here where we live, not in the life to come (as wonderful as you may imagine it to be). Right here, right now, people are needed who will live according to God's rule (or kingdom), making the justice (or righteousness) of God a visible, tangible, follow-able way of life. This is what Jesus taught his disciples. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus teaches us this way today. There are valuable lessons we can learn from the histories and cultures of Indigenous people in Australia, which clearly share the values that we find in Matthew's Gospel, what Pope John Paul II referred to on his visit to Alice Springs in 1986 as "the lasting genius and dignity of your race."³*

³ Address of John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park Alice Springs, 29 November 1986.

Matthew 7:21-29

It is a chilling notion to consider that Jesus could reject as "evil" great and wondrous acts done in his name! Yet so focussed is the Gospel of Matthew on following Jesus' way in doing God's will, acts of dogged and determined faith, (like the gritty endurance required to weather storms and floods, or persecution and dispossession) are far more important than spectacular "deeds of power." Recall the faith of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who have, for generations, given us strong examples to follow and have nurtured our hope in God and our passion for justice.

More notes and resources for Matthew 7:21-29 are available in materials prepared by the Rev. Dr. John Brown (2005) can be found on the NATSIEC website at:

http://www.ncca.org.au/_data/page/336/Reconciliation_Week_Worship_Resources_2005.5.29.pdf

Working with Genesis 6: 9-22; 7:24; 8:14-19

The amazing story of the family of Noah, God's relationship with humankind, the great flood and its aftermath, including the covenant, deserve more attention than this selection from the Revised Common Lectionary can do justice. Chapters 6 to 9 deserve to be studied for the depth and value of these Scriptures to be appreciated. A quality interpretative commentary (such as that by Walter Brueggemann) would also help. Just one lesson that has been appreciated from this passage is to see how the way God looks at the world and humanity shifts from grief and disappointment (Genesis 6:6) to determination to stand by the covenant "with every living creature," no matter what happened (Genesis 9:12). This covenant does not rely on the goodness of Noah and his family, but upon the faithfulness of God. In building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, it is God we are depending upon to bless our work together.

Hymn/song: *Inspired by love and anger From Together in Song (No. 674)*

Affirmation of faith (A traditional affirmation of faith may be used here. See *Uniting in Worship, Volumes 2.*)

In addition, to mark Reconciliation Week, worship leaders may like to make use of the narrative song by Paul Kelly called "From little things, big things grow" (From the album, *Songs from the South: the best of Paul Kelly.*) Lyrics available on:

http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/p/paul_kelly/from_little_things_big_things_grow.html

A special version of the song "From little things, big things grow," authorised by Paul Kelly and purveyed on audio and video by the GetUp Mob can be located at:

<http://www.getup.org.au/campaign/MakeThisAHit&id=329> .

Offerings (Uniting Church folk may wish to direct donations to the work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, through their state or to the national office).

Prayers of the people

Phrases from the 1994 Covenant Statement of the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Response (UAICC) will be used to introduce passages of prayer. It may be wise to use extra voices other than the worship leader's to speak the words from the Covenant Statement (UCA) and the Response (UAICC or "Congress").

Worship leaders are encouraged to use and/or adapt the following prayers.⁴

Suggested Prayer Responses:

Leader: Our hope is in God

All: From this day and forever

Voice of UCA (1994): 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.

Voice of Congress (1994): Your ancestors came to us in different ways and we saw little of our caring God in them. They did not come to us as God's will would dictate but to dispossess us ...As a direct result of this violent dispossession Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander people have lived as strangers and outcasts in their own land.

Leader: We pray for healing and reconciliation for past and continuing hurts and resentments between our peoples. May the recent gestures of governments and churches extend into new and courageous actions for justice in this land.

God, we thank you for the wonder of creation and for those whose lives rejoice in the many gifts and sustenance that it provides. We thank you for the original peoples of this land and ask that all Australians may come to acknowledge and value their continuing contribution to the life and uniqueness of this island continent.

Leader: Our hope is in God

All: From this day and forever

Voice of UCA (1994): 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.

Voice of Congress (1994): Whilst the church attempted to stem the decimation of our people and culture by providing missions and sanctuaries, in very many instances

⁴ UCA National Assembly Covenant Statement and UAICC Response 1994:
<http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/news/partnerships>

it did not attempt to understand our ways, our laws or social and economic structures.

Leader: We pray for a growing depth of respect for Indigenous people in Australia, past and present. Help us to be more open to building relationships with Indigenous people and Indigenous sisters and brothers in the Church. May we strengthen their work with our support and encourage their efforts in the name of Christ.

Leader: Our hope is in God

All: From this day and forever

Voice of UCA (1994): 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 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'.

Voice of Congress (1994): We agree with you that the church, which had a responsibility to be the conscience of the invaders, in many instances relinquished this responsibility and joined with the invaders in a great many atrocities by smoothing the pillow for what was believed to be a dying race.

Leader: We give thanks for signs of hope as some people of goodwill in the fields of agriculture, science and government seek to understand how to work with this land and how to consult with its people. We give thanks for the many stories of hope as individuals and congregations, schools and agencies, give concrete expression to the Church's Covenant with Indigenous people. May more people join them in practical action and meaningful cooperation.

Leader: Our hope is in God

All: From this day and forever

Voice of UCA (1994): 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.

Voice of Congress (1994): Your commitment to be practical in seeking to be united in a new relationship will be assessed by your decisions to resource the Congress ministry and to be actively involved in ministry alongside and with Aboriginal and Islander people to change the present disadvantage.

Leader: We pray for the Congress and our relationship with it. We acknowledge a long term commitment that deserves greater energy to "close the gap" between the living, health and education standards of the majority of Australians, and those of our Indigenous people. Help us to deepen awareness and a sense of urgency in church and nation. May the voices of people in our churches, schools and agencies join with all people of goodwill in this country to make a concerted impact on those areas of inequity and suffering that have held sway far too many years.

Leader: Our hope is in God
All: From this day and forever

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (as or if required)

The Peace

Hymn/Song: from *Together in Song* (No. 538), *Feed us now, Bread of life, in this holy meal*

Setting of the table

Great prayer of thanksgiving

The Lord's Prayer

The breaking of the bread

Lamb of God

The communion

Prayer after communion

The Sending Forth of the People of God

Hymn/Song: from *Together in Song* (No. 631), *Father, Lord of all creation, ground of being, life and love*

Word of mission: from Aboriginal Activist Groups in Queensland, 1970s with Lilla Watson: *If you're coming to help to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

Blessing

Dismissal

Acknowledgements and More Resources

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) National Site:

<http://www.bergetti.com/PRIVATE/UAICC/index.html>

Additional resources are available at National Council of Churches in Australia site, relating to Indigenous matters (NATSIEC):

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

<http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec/theology/events/hab>

Uniting Church South Australian Synod/Presbytery Covenanting website:

<http://www.sa.uca.org.au/site/page.cfm?u=248>

Bruce Prewer Prayer (from Revised Edition of *Australian Prayers*)

<http://www.sa.uca.org.au/site/page.cfm?u=369>

Robin Mann's Music website: <http://www.robinmann.com/discography.html>



"Munnari" - John Hammond A'Hang

To find out more about the above image, go to:
<http://nat.uca.org.au/home/pdf/prayerposter.pdf>