

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

---

# LITURGY OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND LAMENT

---

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL APOLOGY  
TO SURVIVORS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHILDHOOD  
SEXUAL ABUSE

OCTOBER 22, 2019

Uniting Church in Australia  
ASSEMBLY



## CONTENT WARNING

This liturgy is to mark the anniversary of the national apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. It acknowledges the experiences of survivors but is not intended to focus on personal stories.

It is possible that this liturgy could raise concerns for people, particularly for those where child sexual abuse has been part of their lives.

Pastoral care should be available during and after the liturgy.

Dealing with trauma from childhood sexual abuse requires specialised support. A list of services in each State and Territory can be accessed at

<https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/support/explore>.



# THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

*Song: When Love is Found and Hope Comes Home by Brian A. Wren*

## **THE FOLDED FLOWERS**



*(At the beginning of the service some folded flowers in various colours are distributed to the congregation. Worship leader explains the symbolism of the flower: our past has been folded like this paper flower, and we hold them to our hearts. During the service, the congregation will place them into a large bowl of water. At the end of service, the congregation will come forward and collect them again.)*

## **DEDICATION OF WATER**

*(Worship leader explains the symbolism of water: Through the waters of baptism we remember that we are the beloved of God and are raised to newness of life with Christ.)*

## **LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE**

*(Worship leader invites a family to light the Christ Candle).*

**Christ said: "I am the light of the world".  
The light shines in the darkness;  
and the darkness has not overcome it.**

## **THE LAND AND THE PEOPLES**

*(Responses are in the BOLD FONT)*

As we look upon the hills and valleys,  
we see the love poured out upon this Land by those who have cared for this  
Land since time beyond measure.

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We honour those who  
have gone before  
and those who are yet to come.

We acknowledge the [                    ] people, *(insert the name of First People upon  
whose land we gather)* **traditional custodians of this land under God.**

We acknowledge that the First People 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.**

We acknowledge that 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;

**and so we rejoice in the reconciling purpose of God found in the good  
news about Jesus Christ.**

*(The music, song, and hymns in this order of service are suggestions.)*

**Hymn: TIS 418 Enemy Of Apathy by John L. Bell**  
**Song: Sorrowing Song by Robin Mann**  
**Song: Beautiful Things by Michael Gungor**

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Today we mark the anniversary of  
the National Apology to survivors of  
institutional childhood sexual abuse.

To support all survivors,  
we will open our hearts and we will be still.

**We will not turn away....**

Let us pray:  
God of the vulnerable,

**God of the oppressed,**

God who gathers up the little child and  
shows them to the world as precious beyond words.

**Help us to be present to your Spirit**



Help us to walk boldly into this house of grief

**We come here today** to remember the folded past

**We come here today** to remember the catastrophic history of sexual abuse of children

**Today is a Day of Mourning.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Merciful God,  
**We, the community of faith,  
acknowledge and lament  
the violence and abuse  
done to the survivors of childhood sexual abuse  
in the history of this nation.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Today is a Day of Lament

**We remember the stories of brokenness  
and the terrible breach of trust.**

We lift the profound suffering to God,  
and we bring before you our prayers for all survivors.

**And we say sorry.**

And we say sorry.

**And we say sorry.**

We acknowledge and lament  
the way in which their innocence was ripped from them

**We pray for their hidden memories and fear of the past.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

We acknowledge and lament

**the way in which the Christian church  
was so often not only complicit in abuse  
but also used cheap forgiveness  
to mask ongoing suffering.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**



Today we come and pray for restoration.  
We commit ourselves to truth telling,

**Give us courage, O Lord,**  
to stay in the unbearable moments,  
to never forget the past,  
**to shine your light in all that is hidden**

Today is a Day of Change.

**We acknowledge and lament  
in a time of crying out for justice,  
our communities have been indifferent  
when we should have been outraged,  
we have been silent when we should have spoken out.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Today we come and pray for healing.  
We commit ourselves to building a culture of safety, making the  
Church safe for all people, taking survivors and communities  
to a place where all can thrive.

God of mercy,  
**forgive us**  
for we have failed survivors in the past,  
**give us the grace to make a fresh start.**

By your Spirit, transform our compassion  
**so that we may see what Christ sees  
hear what Christ hears  
love how Christ loves.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Hear the promise of God's love to us all....  
May God forgive us and the Spirit enable  
us to grow in love.

### **Placing of the Flower**

*(Contemplative music to be played...The congregation members bring forward the  
folded paper flowers and place them into the water. This is a symbol of coming  
together, bringing our grief, our pain and our concerns before God.)*

**Hymn: We cannot measure how you heal by John Bell**  
**Song: Nothing is lost on the breath of God by Colin Gibson**



## **THE SERVICE OF THE WORD**

### **Psalm 121**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?

**My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.**

God will not let your foot be moved;  
God who keeps you will not slumber.

**God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord is your keeper;  
The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.

**The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.**

The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.

**The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both  
now and forever.**

### **Matthew 19: 13-15**

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

These are the words of faith

**Thanks be to God.**

**Sermon:**

**Reflection notes:** This scene is beautifully human. Note that children in Jewish society had no rights they could not dominate anyone, which may be why Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them rather than to the powerful who dominate others. This cultural place has been a reality for society and for the Church.

The Community of Christ is one of welcome and value for all people, including children.

The disciples' protection of Jesus from the Children, and the inherent valuing of adults over children is a challenge for the Church today. How does the Church proclaim a God of Grace



for all people... not just in its speaking but also in its living.

*(Note: the voice of Children was often not believed ... with the Church believing adults over children when accusations of abuse arose).*

The Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these... how does the Church "belong" to children. How are their voices heard? How is their safety (and everyone's safety) ensured?

If the Church is not a safe place, it is incongruous to the gracious love of God in Christ which calls us to be a community in which we share, and grow and serve. It is incongruous to a community who might hear its message of Christ. That incongruity faces the Church as a result of the Royal Commission.

It is easy to identify this issue as 'other' than us. "It couldn't/didn't happen here". When we make this issue someone else's, we open ourselves to complacency and we ignore the challenge for us all... that to bear witness to God's love in Jesus Christ is to create a Community of welcome and safety, for all who may engage it.

It is the Christian conviction that everyone is created equal in the image of God. The term "such as these" also points to the future that the fullness of life in God's Kingdom is open to these children.

Therefore, here in the passage the children are invited forward. In the midst of this interaction there is a challenge to shift... away from mis-understood valuing toward welcome...away from misappropriated witness to authentic community.

This is the challenge the Church is invested in. For all those who have been harmed in the life of the Church... appropriate processes of Redress and apology, appropriate processes for restoration. For all those who are in the community of faith, the witness that this community of faith is a community of safety. And, as we seek to continue to bear witness to Christ, the challenge, for each one of us, that being a community of safety is our responsibility... together.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Loving God, we know that you hold us in the palm of your hand.

**We know it is so.**

So why, O God, why?

**This sin against your small ones**

Why this assault on body and on soul, this destruction of innocence.



**Why, O God, O why?**

We pray today for survivors of child sexual abuse, we pray for justice, for strength and healing.

**God open us to your courage**

We pray for family and friends of child abuse survivors, and all who provide care and support.

**God open us to your love**

We pray for those whose family member or friend has died as a result of their abuse.

**God open us to your holy grief**

We acknowledge with gratitude the work of the Royal Commission who enabled survivors to speak of their suffering, showed us our sin and called us to mend our ways.

**We give thanks.**

We acknowledge with gratitude, advocates who exposed the truth about institutional child abuse and who campaigned for truth-telling and justice.

**We give thanks.**

We acknowledge our need to change as a Church. Strengthen us to act with justice towards survivors, to listen to our children and to implement policies and practices which create safer communities.

**Reform us O God.**

We commit ourselves as your Church to being places of safety, free of abuse and exploitation.  
We commit ourselves as your Church to be communities, where people can flourish in life-giving ways of trust and love.

**Reform us O God.**

Through Christ we pray, Amen



## **HOLY COMMUNION**

**Hymn: In Trust We Come by Marnie Barrell**  
**Song: The Canticle of Mary by Marty Haugen**

*(The congregation is encouraged to reflect our unity with Christ in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine.)*

### ***Simplified version of traditional Communion Liturgy***

Christ our Lord invites to his table  
all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live  
in peace with one another.

Be present, risen Lord Jesus,  
as you were with your disciples,  
and make yourself known to us  
in the breaking of the bread;  
for you live and reign with the Father  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us  
and on these gifts of bread and wine,  
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one with him, one with each other, and one in ministry in  
the world, until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.

**Unite us in faith, inspire us to love,  
Encourage us with hope,  
That we may receive Christ  
As he comes to us in the brokenness of the bread  
And in the sharing of his cup of salvation.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

And now with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray  
the prayer Jesus taught us in our heart language.

**Our Father in Heaven hallowed be  
Your name your Kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in Heaven**

**Give us today our daily bread  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil**

**For the Kingdom, the Power  
and the Glory are yours**

**Now and forever. Amen**



The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

### **The Distribution**

Songs may be played or sung while communion is served.

**Taize Chant: Eat this bread**

**Taize Chant: In God Alone**

**Song: Will We Ever Rise by The Brilliance**

### **THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE**

#### **The Peace**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

#### **Collecting the Flowers**

*(People are invited to come forward after the sharing of the peace and collect the flowers from the water. The folded paper flower should be opened due to water surface tension. A hidden message is revealed: "God cares for you". People take this symbol of restoration home and share the message with others.)*

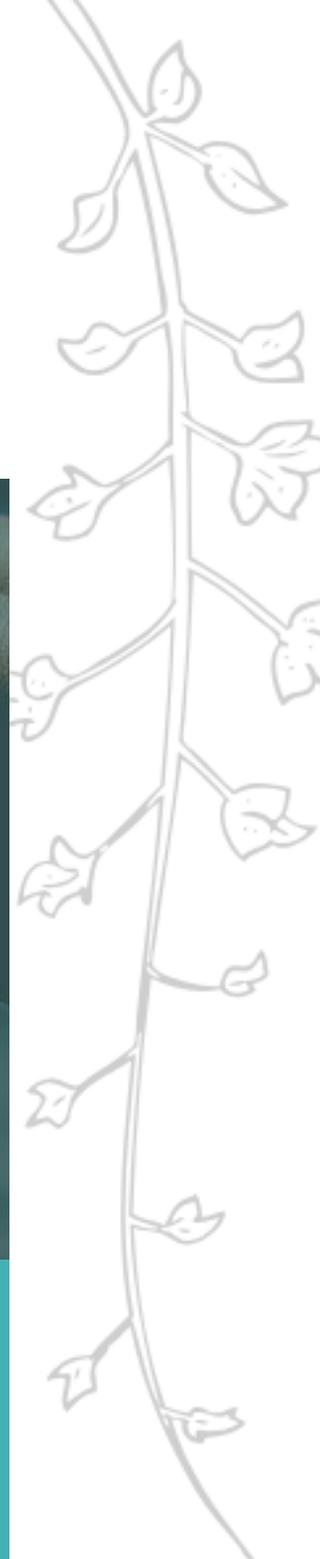
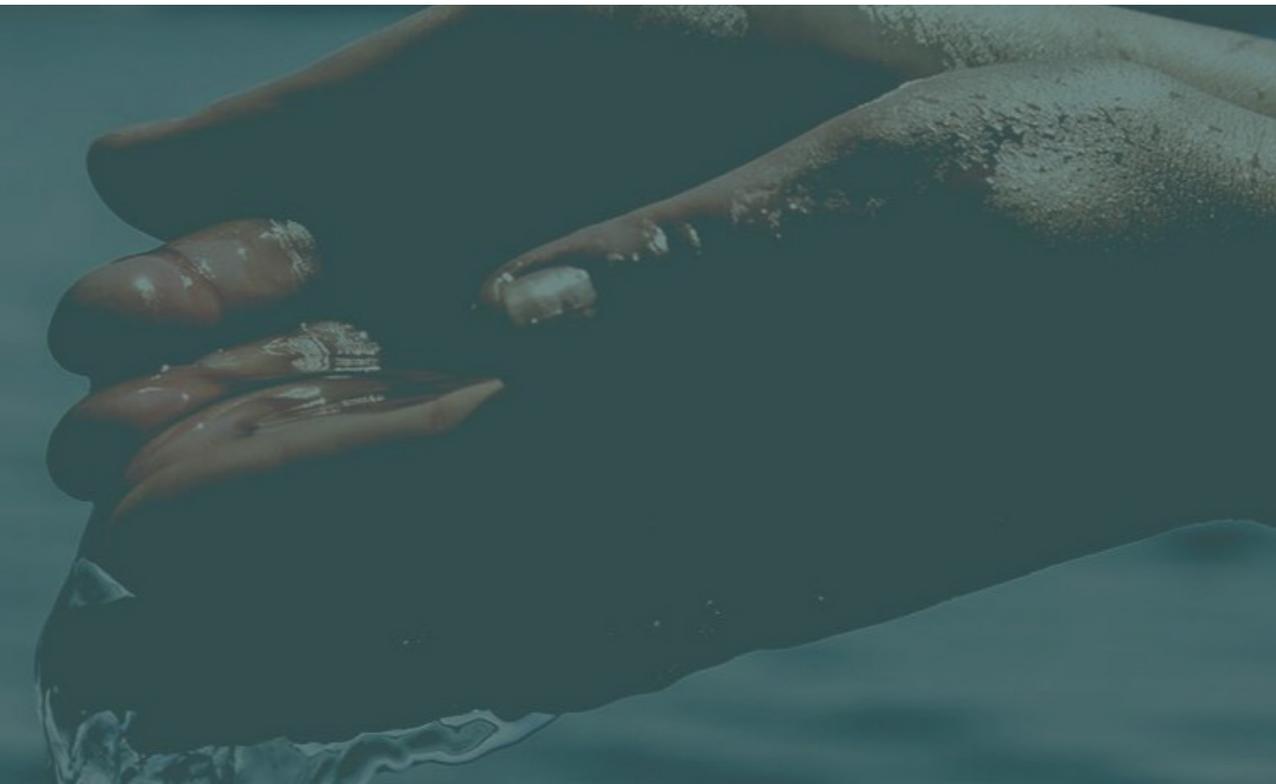
**Song: The Kingdom is Yours by Joncarlos Velez & Jamie Macdonald**

**Song: For You, Deep Stillness by Julie Perrin**

### **BENEDICTION**

May the love of God enfold us,  
the wisdom of Christ enlighten us,  
and the fire of the Spirit fill us with passion for the Gospel;  
and may the blessing of the holy triune God rest upon us and  
abide with us, now and evermore.

**Amen.**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that this worship service reflects the impact of interpersonal violence and the truth-telling courage of the survivors.

In the spirit of justice and reconciliation, the Uniting Church commits to our ongoing role in bearing witness to those who have suffered.

The observance of the anniversary of the National Apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse was endorsed by the Assembly Standing Committee.

The Liturgy is prepared by Assembly Resourcing Unit, National Safe Church Unit, UCA Redress Ltd, Transforming Worship Circle.

Thanks to those who offered their thoughts as this Liturgy was prepared.



