



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA




UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER  
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS

A GUIDE TO THE CHURCH IN

# Walking Together as First and Second Peoples

– an invitation for 2021 onwards





The Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania is invited to engage more deeply in this journey of Walking Together.

The key aspects of this journey are reflected in: deep listening, creating and broadening of relationships between First and Second Peoples, taking responsibility for justice and

truth telling, and ensuring that the voices of First Peoples are heard and respected within the leadership of the Church and its Councils.

This journey of walking together as First and Second Peoples is our Synod's expression of the Covenant between the UAICC and the UCA.

## What is the Covenant?

In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

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.

After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia heard\* 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.

So 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 (*excerpt from the UCA Preamble to the Constitution*).

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\*The original word in the Preamble is 'discovered'

# This Covenanting Guide....

Within the following pages, you will find various activities that you and your community could undertake to deepen your Covenant journey. Some of these activities you will be able to complete within your own community, others will invite you to seek out the First Peoples of your area and listen to what they have to tell you.

Some actions will encourage a change in the way you approach certain activities within your worship, congregational or agency life. Other suggestions will invite you to step out into the public life of our state and nation and take a stand on matters of justice for the First Peoples of this land.

## The purpose of this Guide is...

- to continue to encourage one another and the Councils of the UCA to affirm and re-commit to the Covenant with the UAICC,
- to continue to encourage the building of relationships with local First Peoples communities where our Congregations, Presbyteries and Synod are located,
- to continue to educate the Church,
- to continue to encourage the Church to engage and deepen relationships between First and Second Peoples,
- to continue to inspire the Church to take action, make commitments and instigate change.

There are intentional blank spaces as each congregation, school, agency, presbytery and the Synod develop their own actions and make this a living document.

Resources to enhance your journey can be found on the Synod Website at this link:

► <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/>

**You are invited as you engage in your chosen activities to:**



**Listen deeply**

**Take responsibility for justice and truth telling**



**Develop relationships**

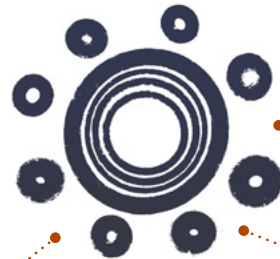
**Keep the Covenant at the heart of the Church's everyday life**



# Engage in an understanding of the Covenant and the preamble to the UCA constitution

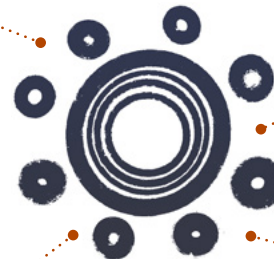
## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Appoint a group or individual to encourage commitment and maintain accountability to the Covenant – networking with other communities. For example: appoint a covenanting companion (see glossary).



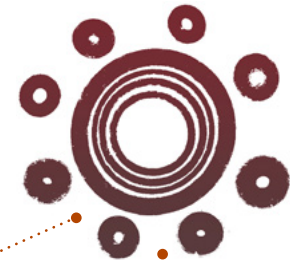
## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Give account of and references to engagement in Covenanting in your guiding documents for the life of your community. For example: in mission studies, strategic plans, congregation's profile.



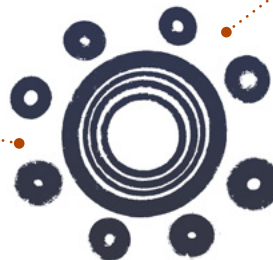
## DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Connect with First People's communities through Walking on Country experiences.



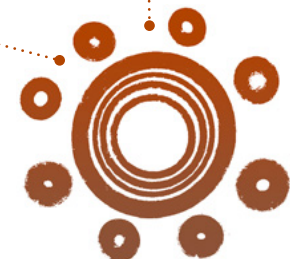
## LISTEN

Engage with the Covenant and the Preamble through study.



## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

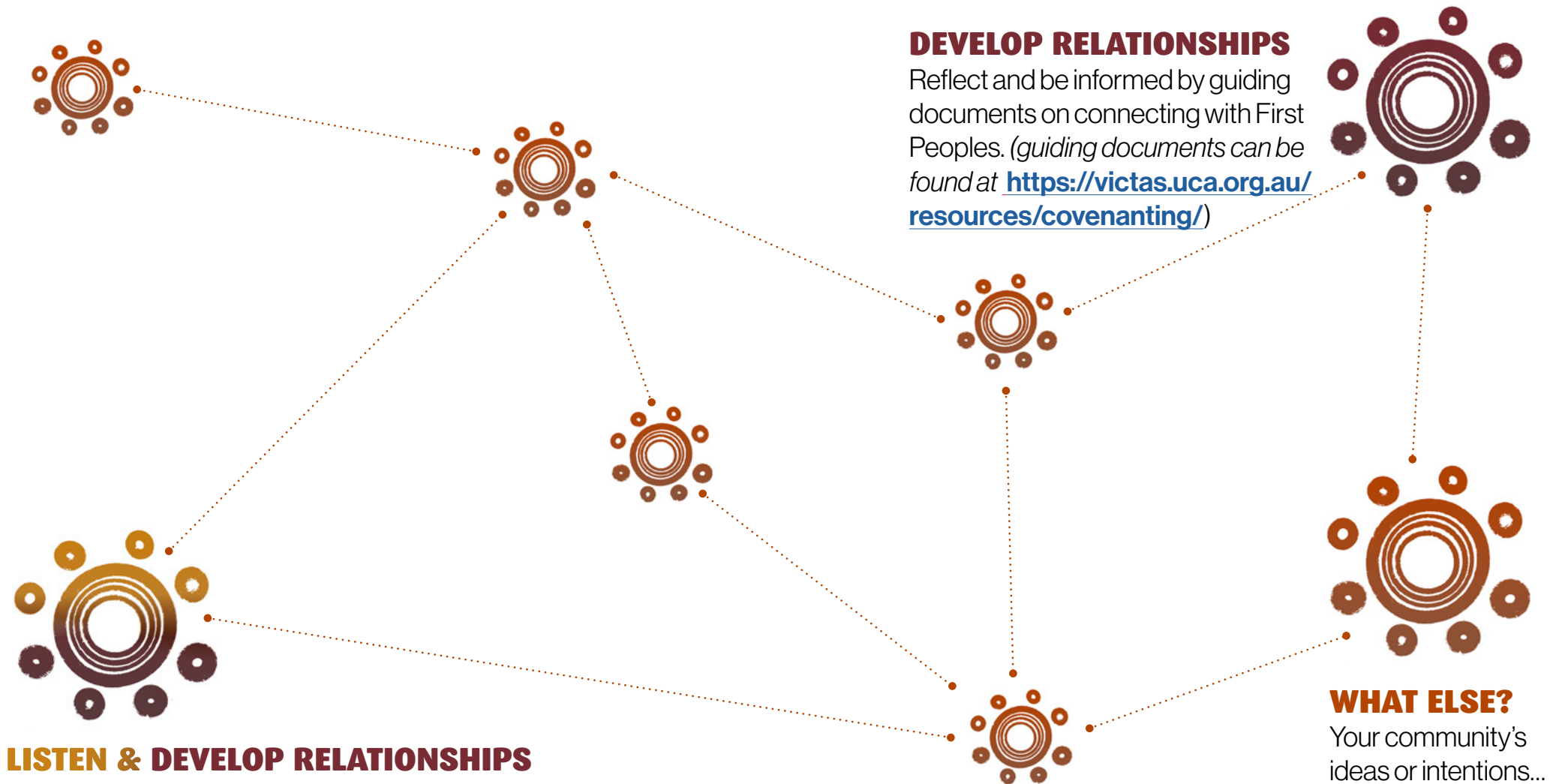
Engage in Cultural Awareness Training for all staff, members and ministries at least every 2-3 years (including candidates).



## WHAT ELSE?

Your community's ideas, intentions and actions...

# Identify and make contact, where appropriate, welcome and engage with the local First Peoples

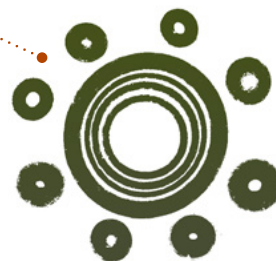


# Transform spaces and processes to be safe and welcoming of First Peoples



## **LISTEN**

Make space for and normalise the inclusion of local First Peoples' stories in worship and meetings.



## **AT THE HEART**

Identify references to First Peoples in all UCA documents, histories and Certificates of Land Title.



## **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS & AT THE HEART**

UCA Worship acknowledges and welcomes First Peoples' leadership in services particularly in NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks, and for the Sunday before January 26<sup>th</sup> "Service of Mourning".

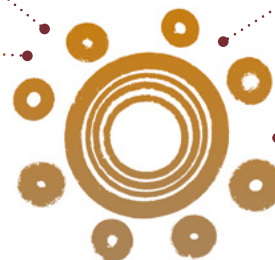
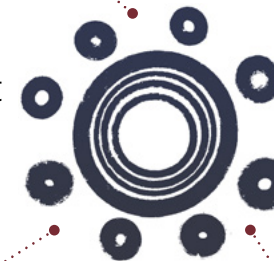


## **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY & AT THE HEART**

All meetings and worship to begin with an Acknowledgement of Country.

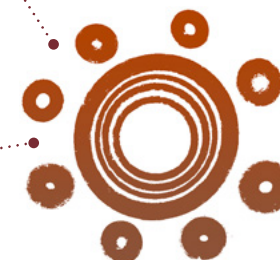
## **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

Continue to place acknowledgement signs on all UCA agencies, facilities and churches with wording agreed by local First Nations.



## **LISTEN**

In collaboration with First Peoples, transform worship and meeting spaces to ensure they are safe and welcoming.



## **WHAT ELSE?**

Your community's ideas or intentions...

# Make space for, listen to, and respect the voices of First Peoples in each Council of the Church



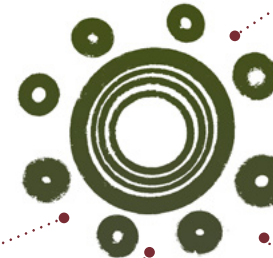
## AT HEART

All formal UCA gatherings will include the voices of First Peoples, either in person or through agreed creative processes.



## AT HEART

Formal meetings within the Synod have sessions identified and co-chaired by First Peoples' leadership.



## WHAT ELSE?

Your community's ideas or intentions...

## AT HEART

With UAICC identify emerging leaders and community elders and ensure they are supported to be eligible for nomination and appointment to committees and boards.



# Listen to and study the stories from the First Peoples of the impact of colonisation



## **LISTEN**

Form a study group to read and reflect on texts of significance. For example: Dark Emu, Charles Harris Biography.



## **LISTEN**

Truth-telling – hear stories from First Peoples' Communities & Traditional Owner Organisations to understand the contemporary impact of colonisation on First Nations Peoples and enter into intentional dialogue.



## **LISTEN**

Seek out and invite opportunities to listen, learn and understand the ways in which traditional Indigenous beliefs can enrich and expand our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

## **WHAT ELSE?**

Your community's ideas or intentions...

# Study and engage with indigenous theology and spirituality



## DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Identify an opportunity to Walk on Country led by local First Peoples or Congresses.



## LISTEN

Recognise and study the lived experience of First Peoples integrating Indigenous Spirituality with Christian theology.



## WHAT ELSE?

Your community's ideas or intentions...

# Build partnerships with and support for the ministry and mission of the UAICC



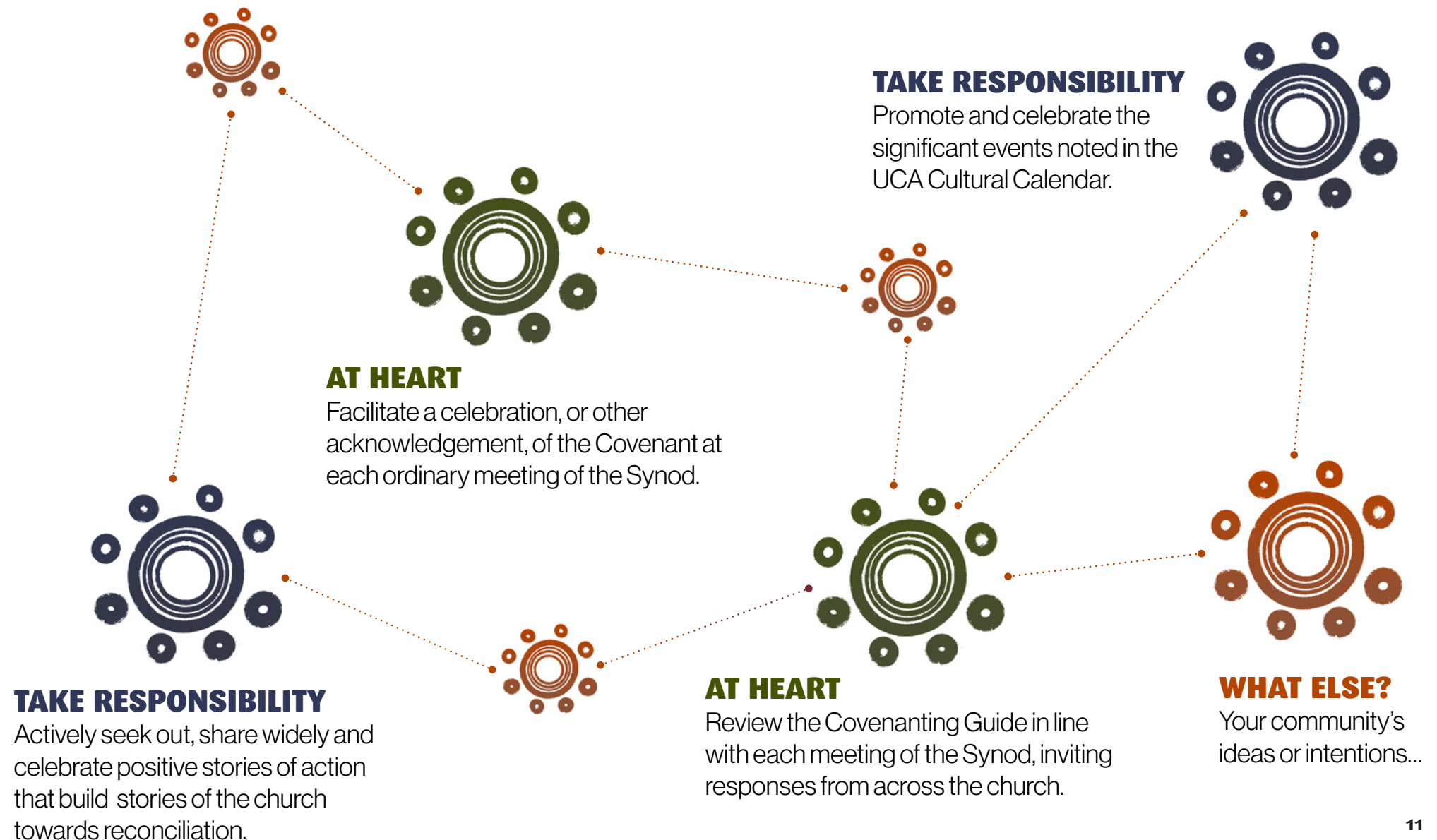
## DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

Set up dialogue opportunities that lead to a better relationship between UAICC and Synod bodies for all spheres of the Church.

## WHAT ELSE?

Your community's ideas or intentions...

# Celebrate the life of UAICC and the progress of reconciliation and covenanting



# Participate in justice and advocacy for First Peoples

## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Communicate to the wider church the process and outcomes of advocacy. For example: contributing to the Assembly Circle - Walking together.



## LISTEN

Learn how to travel with First Peoples facing prosecution within the relevant justice agency in Tasmania.



## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Build awareness of processes in the Victorian Justice system of the Koori Court, and learn how to travel with First Peoples facing prosecution.



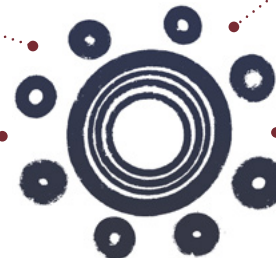
## LISTEN

Actively promote and participate in social justice issues identified by First Peoples including the matter of Sovereignty and the Statement from the Heart (as well as Deaths in Custody, Protecting Sacred sites, COAG – Closing the Gap Targets).



## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Actively support First Peoples self-determination for cultural preservation and reclamation. For example: through advocacy with local politicians.



## WHAT ELSE?

Your community's ideas or intentions...

# Glossary

**Assembly Circles** - The Assembly Circles of Interest are a national online and social media platform covering seven of the core values of the Uniting Church. The circles are spaces for learning and sharing, deepening faith, contributing ideas and connecting with other passionate people.

**COAG** - The Council of Australian Governments is an intergovernmental forum comprising of the federal government, the six states and two mainland territories, and the Australian Local Government Association. As a body, it helps manage inter-governmental relations within the Australian federal system on matters of national importance.

**The Covenant** - While a covenant broadly means an agreement, the Covenant when applied to the Uniting Church context with First Peoples specifically refers to an agreement entered into in 1994 between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress

**Covenanting** - Covenanting is the unique call to reconciliation and renewal within the life Uniting Church of Australia, and is the coming together of First and Second Peoples to form meaningful and respectful relationship as an act of faith.

**Covenanting Companion** - an individual or group that encourages, coordinates and animates a particular community in their the engagement with the Covenant.

**Ministry Agents** - Roles within the life of the Uniting Church undertaken by a person called to serve God. Ministry agents captures all roles traditional known as placements, including Ministers of the Word, Deacons and Pastors.

**Preamble (to the Uniting Church Constitution)** - The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to a relationships which fosters just, inclusive and equal relationships, recognising the place of First Peoples in Australia. To acknowledge this, revisions to the Preamble of the Uniting Church Constitution were developed and adopted after extensive consultation throughout the Church and UAICC over 2009 and 2010.

**Statement from the Heart** - The Uluru Statement was a national Indigenous consensus position on Indigenous constitutional recognition, which came out of a constitutional convention of 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates. The Uluru Statement was the culmination of 13 Regional Dialogues held around the country and was released in May 2017.

**UAICC, or Congress** - Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia, and members in fellowship who may also be members of any other denomination, seeking to fulfil their calling as Christians among their own people.

**Walking Together** - is our Synod's expression of the Covenant between the UAICC and the UCA.

**Walking on Country** - Activities led by First Peoples to deepen Second People's understanding of faith and spirituality. Activates usually include both First and Second Peoples. They can be a single day trip or retreats spanning several day. Specifically designed to enrich cultural understanding within a context of First People's theology.



Prepared by the Covenanting Action Plan Working Group, under the auspices of the Synod of VicTas.

Contact: [Synod@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Synod@victas.uca.org.au)

Resources for the journey: <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/>

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