



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Exploring the Vision

A study series
for small groups

Following Christ,
walking together
as First and Second Peoples,
seeking community, compassion
and justice for all creation

*Study 2 Walking Together as First
and Second Peoples*



Study 2

Walking together as First and Second Peoples

INTRODUCTION

There are few issues as important for Australia today as how the First Peoples are recognised and respected. How do we, as Christians of diverse cultures, seek to live as people of reconciliation? How can we, as Australians, walk and live together as people of compassion, justice, peace and hope? These words from our vision statement - Walking Together as First and Second Peoples - reflect the importance of this concern.

This study invites you to explore where we have come from as a nation and as a church, and how as First and Second Peoples we might walk together in the future. It is a study that, with gratitude, draws upon a fuller 2015 study series published by the UCA Assembly called *Walking Together: Exploring the Covenant between First and Second Peoples*. Once you have completed this briefer study, you may wish to go deeper by reading the full Assembly series and the other resources listed at the end of this study.

A copy of the Preamble to the UCA Constitution (2009) is included at the end of this study. You may choose to copy pages 10 -11 for each group member to use during the relevant exercises.

Two UCA Assembly videos are included as part of this study. These can be viewed from the Assembly website at: assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether, and clicking the appropriate video link.

May your conversations and prayers lead you to a deeper understanding of the relationship between Australia's First and Second Peoples, and may you discover a growing personal commitment to walking together in this land.

.....

Key Contributors:

Walking Together (2015) studies and supporting videos developed by the Assembly of the United Church in Australia (used with permission). Web reference: assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether

Other contributors

Specific review:

Rev Deacon Michelle Cook. Presbytery Minister - Mission Development, Presbytery of Tasmania

GATHERING WORSHIP

Opening prayer

After welcoming your group, invite one or more people to lead the following prayer.

Creator of all things,
Both seen and unseen,
Speak to us in your great wisdom.
Make us strong as we seek
Your help and guidance.
Teach us to love all people
Regardless of race or colour or belief.
May we listen with great care
To the heartbeat of this land
And to its people
Who cared for it so well
And for so long.
May the peace these people and their land
Have always enjoyed
Continue to be strengthened and preserved
By all who wish to come and be part of
This country and its 'Ancient Dreaming'.

Used with permission of Elizabeth Pike, 1998. Assembly Working Group on Worship,
Resources suitable for worship and prayer with, or in support of, the First Peoples of this land.

Song – If your group enjoys singing, some suggestions include:

- *Deeper River* (Digby Hannah), *As One Voice* #6
- *A voice is heard* (Trisha Watts & Monica O'Brien), *All Together Whatever* #430

Group sharing – Listening to one another

Listening is very important. If you didn't listen to the stories it was a matter of life and death. You wouldn't know where to find food. You wouldn't know where to find water. So you had to listen very carefully. And part of listening was observing. Dad would have had to observe his Elders to know where to dig. These are all very important ways of how we learn too. To be watching and listening and observing our Elders. I always say we either learn by listening or we make mistakes. This is true for all people.

Rev Denise Champion, Yarta Wandatha, page 9.

A key part of our time together is listening – listening to one another, listening to voices of leaders from across the Church, and listening to the formal words of our Church through its councils.

Let us begin by listening to one another.

**You are invited to share your responses to the following questions,
one person at a time,
without comment from other people,
listening carefully to one another.**

First time around the group:

Where did you grow up? Who did you grow up with?

Who passed on to you the wisdom of your family and the ways of your people?

Now go around the group a second time, responding to these questions one at a time.

How are you feeling about our study topic today?
What will we need to do in order to listen well to one another?

EXPLORING THE THEME

Introducing the Preamble

In this study, we will explore the experience of First Peoples, in particular their experience of God in this land, and their experience of colonisation.

The Uniting Church has two key statements that relate to Indigenous Peoples – a Covenanting Statement from 1994 and a revised Preamble to the Church's Constitution from 2009. It is likely that many Church members have never seen these important documents. They express key understandings about our history as different peoples in this land and our commitments about our shared future. Some of the statements may come as a surprise, or a challenge.

The Preamble to the Uniting Church's Constitution gives us a succinct statement of our histories in this country both as Australians and as people of God. It is a good place to start as it challenges us to be honest about the past. Rev Dr Chris Budden explains:

As the name implies, Preambles come before Constitutions. They are ways of introducing the Constitution. They say: "We are this sort of people, shaped by this sort of history, and valuing these kinds of things, so this is how we want to shape our life together". The Preamble seeks to name in the 'law' of the Church who we are as First and Second Peoples, and what this means for the way we shape our life together.

Group exercise - responding to the Preamble

NOTE: A copy of the Preamble is included at the end of this study. You may choose to copy these pages for each group member to use during the following exercises.

1. Decide together whether you wish to read the Preamble aloud, asking each person to read a paragraph in turn, or allow people to read individually. (Another option is to print sections in large print on separate pieces of paper and place them around the room.)
2. Read the Preamble together in the way you have decided. Encourage one another to make personal notes as you read. For example:
 - Underline a statement that stands out to you
 - Place a '?' next to parts that raise questions for you
 - Place a tick next to parts that you affirm and support

3. Watch Assembly Video #1 – Speaking about Our Past (found at assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether)
4. In a spirit of respectful listening, give time for each person to share their response to reading the Preamble and/or watching the video.
5. You are invited to consider together the following:
 - Clauses 1 to 3 may raise challenging questions about the presence and experience of God in this ancient land. In what ways has God been present through creation and the ancient culture of Australia's First Peoples? How does our own culture shape our faith? How are we limited in seeing a differing faith in other cultures?
 - Clauses 4 to 7 acknowledge that while some people approached First Peoples respectfully, the history of the Church has often reflected the paternalism, racism, ignorance and denial evident in colonial society. How do you react to these statements? What evidence of this do you see in our history or from our experience today? What Scripture verses come to mind as you consider this?

CONNECTING WITH SCRIPTURE

In your group, ask several members to read the selected Bible passages aloud. Pause for a short time after each passage for silent reflection before proceeding with group discussion.

Isaiah 40:21-31

1. **'Have you not known? Have you not heard?'** (verses 21 and 28) is a repeated refrain from this Isaiah reading. Noting this refrain, but acknowledging the whole passage, share together what you think might be the prophet's key message.

The God of all creation is speaking through the prophet, and God seems to be frustrated. Perhaps the prophet's original audience had lost its way, had narrowed its understanding of God and relationship to God's creation.

While the God of creation speaks "from the beginning", by comparison the times of earthly rulers come and go in the briefest of moments. Through all time and all creation, the voice of the everlasting God can be heard. Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

2. In what ways might this repeated refrain (verses 21 and 28) be an applicable word for us in Australia today? In learning about the ancient land and culture of Australia's First Peoples, how may Australia's Second Peoples have "not known" and "not heard"?

How and where was God at work in this land before the arrival of the Second Peoples?

3. The prophetic word is a call for God's people to "lift up your eyes on high and see" (verse 26) and also to "wait for the Lord" (verse 31). In the relationship between First and Second Peoples, how might your group begin:
 - a) To see (to learn) more clearly and more deeply?
 - b) To wait (to listen) more patiently and more respectfully?

Psalm 78:1-8

"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us" (verses 2-3).

4. In this Psalm, the "things that we have heard and known" (verse 3) stand in contrast to our previous reading in which things were "not heard" and "not known".

Try to list the 'things' heard and known that are described in these verses. How might such things be understood in our own times, or as part of our own learning as we grow?

From the most ancient of times, the knowledge and wisdom of the elders has been passed down from generation to generation. This has been taught in parables, in stories, in sayings and in the teachings of the ancestors. In these generational teachings are gifts of knowledge, hope and remembrance (verses 6 and 7). This is so we might be who we are – a steadfast and faithful people (verse 8).

Share together

Share together how this understanding speaks to the gift that Indigenous culture and spirituality might be to all Australians.

A prayer response by Second Peoples

Merciful God,
we, the Second Peoples of this land,
acknowledge with sorrow the injustice and abuse
that has so often marked the treatment of the First Peoples of this land.
We acknowledge with sorrow the way in which their land was taken from them
and their language, culture and spirituality despised and suppressed.
We acknowledge with sorrow the way in which the Christian church
was so often not only complicit in this process but actively involved in it.
We acknowledge with sorrow that in our own time
the injustice and abuse has continued.
We have been indifferent when we should have been outraged,
we have been apathetic when we should have been active,
we have been silent when we should have spoken out.

Gracious God, forgive us for our failures, past and present.

By your Spirit transform our minds and hearts
so that we may boldly speak your truth
and courageously do your will.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assembly Working Group on Worship

CONSIDERING OUR ACTIONS

Noting the journey of covenantal relationship described in clauses 8 to 10 of the Preamble, how do we as a Uniting Church live out our covenant with the UAICC and our commitment to reconciliation with First Peoples? What is our future destiny together?

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.

1994 Assembly, Covenanting Statement.

In the following video, listen for and note the ways in which people seek to live out 'walking together as First and Second Peoples'. Note also the three questions on the following page that will invite response.

Watch Assembly Video #4 –Living Our Covenant

[Note on sovereignty: In the video, UCA President Stuart McMillan raises the issue of sovereignty. Clause 2 of the revised Preamble explains that for First Peoples this means custodians. While there is a move for Australia to recognise Indigenous people in its Constitution, the claim of sovereignty is different. At the very least, it is a reminder that First Peoples did not give up their sense of traditional ownership and custodianship, and cannot simply be assimilated into Australian society at the cost of their languages, law, customs and culture, indeed their identities. The 2015 Assembly meeting agreed to "determine that a significant priority for its life during the next triennium is to explore with Congress what it would mean for the practices of the Church to recognise and affirm that First Peoples are sovereign peoples."]

Follow the video with a time of silence, and then invite members of your group to share (as they are willing) responses to the following questions:

1. What statements from the speakers stood out? What would you want to affirm? What questions were raised?
2. What might walking together as First and Second Peoples mean for your gathered community in terms of commitments, values, and relationships? What might it mean for you as an individual? What practical responses are possible?
3. Name one action or commitment you could make at this time as a response to this study?

CLOSING WORSHIP

Prayer

Have someone lead the following prayer:

Creator God,
we pray for this land, our culture, our customs.
our languages, our people and our nation.
Gather us together to look after this land
so that the beauty of our mother earth
may be preserved for all future generations.

Jesus, our brother, give us your grace,
to be united in one mind, in one heart and in one action
so that we can continue the journey of reconciliation,
and enable all Australians to work together
in love, peace and joy.

We ask you, God the Holy Spirit,
overshadow us with your presence.

We ask you to guide all people, whether black, white
or yellow, so that we can truly learn and have better
understanding in the knowledge of language and
culture in this land, Australia. Amen.

Bishop Saibo Mabo, Chairperson, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC), 2012



Entering into a listening space

Enter into a quiet and prayerful space by silently reading one or more of the following three quotes:

Reflecting upon three months travelling with family across Australia, Clare Boyd-Macrae wrote:

I learnt more about myself than I would in three years at home. I learnt about this wild country. I realised how puffed up with our own importance we south-eastern city dwellers are: beavering away on the edge of this island, oblivious to all that ancient waiting indifferent vastness to the north and west. I learnt to fear the bush. I learnt to love it.

When we got back.... I thought I'd be desperate to talk about my experiences and no one would be particularly interested. Quite the reverse occurred. People did ask, often asked good questions, but I couldn't talk. I found myself literally unable to reply; I felt on the verge of tears when people pressed me to talk about it... To speak about it would be to reduce it, and it was all inside me still, brimming over, too surprisingly significant to be chatted glibly about.

The Whole Shebang
by Clare Boyd-Macrae (2008)

Our experience of visiting Kakadu and Nitmiluk (Katherine) Gorge profoundly humbled us. We asked ourselves "What do we know? So very little!" We were humbled by the ancient land and the mystery and wonder of an ancient culture. We felt our only option was simply to be silent; to be silent and just ... listen!

Two Victorian tourists in the Top
End, September 2016.

Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course – like the seasons... We don't worry. We know that in time and in the Spirit of dadirri – that deep listening and quiet stillness – God's way will be clear. We are asking our fellow Australians to take the time to know us; to be still and listen to us.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann,
artist, tribal elder Daly River, NT.

In the stillness of this time, reflect alone on any or all of the following questions:

1. What new insights have you gained from this session – about our history, about the Church, about God, about yourself?
2. What has challenged you in this session – your understandings, your attitudes, your faith?
3. What questions do you have at this time?

When it is appropriate to draw your time of stillness to a close, have someone read aloud from **2 Corinthians 5:16-19**.

Closing prayer (by Rev Jennie Gordon)

Pray together

***We go on,
in the compassionate community of love,
finding wonder and wisdom
in all we encounter,
being bearers of hope, kindness and grace
in the name of Christ,
Amen***

Closing Song – If your group enjoys singing, then end your time with:

‘For you, deep stillness’ (Julie Perrin, Robin Mann), *All Together Whatever* 494.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Assembly UCA, *Walking Together* resources - assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether

Rev Denise Champion, *Yarta Wandatha*, c/- UAICC: Salisbury, 2014. sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/aunty-denises-book-yarta-wandatha

Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, HarperCollins: Melbourne, 1997.

Chris Budden, *Following Jesus in Invaded Space*, Pickwick Publications: Eugene Or, 2009.

Doctrine of Discovery movie and other resources - dofdmendo.org/movie/

Assembly Working Group on Worship, Resources suitable for worship and prayer with, or in support of, the First Peoples of this land, available at assembly.uca.org.au/cudw/worship-resources-and-publications/item/861-prayersliturgies

National Council of Churches in Australia (NATSIEC), www.ncca.org.au/index.php/about-us-1 and theology resources www.ncca.org.au/index.php/resources/theology

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), uaicc.org.au

UnitingJustice – various resources - www.unitingjustice.org.au/justice-for-indigenoustralians

Series reviewers:

Rev Jennie Gordon, Minister of the Word, Yarra Ranges Parish, Presbytery of Yarra Yarra
Rev Graeme Harrison, Minister of the Word, Living Faith Church, Presbytery of Yarra Yarra

Series Editor:

Rev David Withers, Strategic Framework Minister, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Preamble to the UCA Constitution (2009)

The Uniting Church in Australia was formed on 22 June, 1977 by the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia after the approval of “The Basis of Union” by the Councils and Courts of those three churches, guided by the belief that they had been called by God into this union.

The Church in accordance with the Basis of Union accepts that the responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them and so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally, government is entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing gifts and graces, with which God has endowed them for the building up of God’s Church and that therefore the Church shall be governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation to the Church and the world.

The Church in accordance with the Basis of Union acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law, the aim of which is to confess God’s will for the life of Christ’s Church. As the Church believes God guided it into union so it believes that God is calling it to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many lands, and as part of that to

RECOGNISE THAT

1. When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.
2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning ‘sovereign’ in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.
3. The First Peoples 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. 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.
4. Some members of the uniting churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their wellbeing, culture and language as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.
5. Many in the uniting churches, however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.
6. The uniting churches were largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and interrelationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.

7. From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.
8. In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.
9. 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.
10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered 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.

AND THUS 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.



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA





Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

