

Covenanting & Reconciliation FAQ



Covenanting (Uniting Church)

Covenanting in the Uniting Church is the theologically informed relationship between First and Second Peoples. It seeks to build a mutual understanding of the significant contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to the church and Australia. The Covenanting movement in the Uniting Church is an intentional response to God's call of being a missional Church, and built from a desire for equal partnership, and to not be bound by colonial or paternalistic ideas and policies.

Following the establishment of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC or Congress) in 1985, and after 9 years of exploring how to faithfully be in an intentionally Spirit led relationship, our Covenanting relationship formally began in 1994 with the reading of two [Covenanting Statements](#) at the 7th Assembly.

An overly simplified understanding of Covenanting in the Uniting Church is to think of it as the Church's own expression of the Australian Reconciliation movement. A richer understanding of Covenanting is the truthful examination of the colonial history between First and Second Peoples that invites us to also question the Church's role in colonisation, and what it means for all of us to be God's people. This includes exploring the integrity of the Church and what it means to be an Australian Church on stolen land, and recognising First Nations Sovereignty, Spirituality and understandings of an Aboriginal Christian Theology. For the Church, Covenanting is much more than a broader understanding of the secular Reconciliation movement in Australia, as our faith has enriched our understanding of a truthful and just relationship between First and Second Peoples.

Covenanting also includes engaging in the secular Reconciliation movement. The Uniting Church has widely embraced the formal Reconciliation movement within its membership, polity and ethos. [Covenanting](#),

however, relates to a theologically informed position on the relationships between First and Second Peoples, in which through Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).



Reconciliation (Secular)

The Reconciliation movement between First and Second peoples is a widely understood and accepted secular aspiration in Australia. Its focus is not only on First Peoples, it is a process that intentionally includes Second peoples to allow Australia to reconcile itself with its past, in ways which acknowledge the broad impact of colonialism. Following the 1991 Royal Commission Report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, a formal Reconciliation process was established in the form of the Reconciliation Advancement Council (CAR). In 2001, [Reconciliation Australia](#) was established as the national Reconciliation body following the disbandment of CAR. The Australian Government formally endorses five interrelated dimensions of Reconciliation through the Reconciliation Australia mandate, these are: *race relations, equality and equity, unity, institutional integrity and historical acceptance*.

Formal Reconciliation in Australia is a work in progress. It includes addressing symbolic and practical elements of mainly socio-economic issues facing First Peoples. It is not possible to narrow reconciliation down to a single



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issue. It is a broad discourse including conversations on truth, justice, forgiveness, healing, and identity. At its heart, Reconciliation aims to create meaningful and lasting change in the relationships between First and Second peoples in Australia.



RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Does reconciliation have different meanings?

Yes, and it depends on the context. Within a church context, reconciliation takes a specific biblically informed meaning that speaks to God reconciling the world to God's self through Christ. This is the theologically informed rationale that aligns Covenanting with a Christian world view. In a Secular Australian context, Reconciliation is a formal process begun by the Australian government in 2001 that speaks more to a social and cultural context of improving the relationships between First and Second peoples in Australia.

Do I need to choose between Covenanting and Reconciliation?

No. Our experience and understanding of both the Covenanting and Reconciliation movement informs the other, however Covenanting is the more appropriate context in which to explore the relationship between First and Second peoples within the Uniting Church.

Do all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know about Covenanting?

No. The importance of Covenanting is widely understood and held sacred within the Uniting Church and UAICC. However, while some members of other Christian denominations like the Anglican Church and the Salvation Army may have an awareness of it, it is unlikely people outside of the Uniting Church will have knowledge of what Covenanting means.

I've heard Reconciliation is no longer appropriate, what does that mean?

There are valid criticisms of the formal secular Reconciliation movement that are being debated. A literal understanding of the word 'reconciliation' assumes it's possible to return to a state of mutual co-existence prior to conflict. A truthful examination of the colonial history between First and Second peoples also invites us to question this assumption. Understanding different positions on Reconciliation in light of the lived experiences of First Nations Peoples is an important part of truth-telling, listening and understanding. It is perfectly fine to still be actively engaged in the Reconciliation movement, yet be mindful that some communities might approach the conversation differently. A contemporary framework for structural reform in Australia was proposed in the 2017 [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#), which proposes three key themes: Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling.



Resource available online at: <https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/>



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