

# Preamble to the UCA Constitution FAQ



The revised preamble to the **Uniting Church in Australia Constitution and Regulations** (Basis of Union) was adopted by the Uniting Church Assembly in 2009 during NAIDOC week on July 10<sup>th</sup>. The Preamble reflects the foundations of the **Covenant** relationship between First and Second Peoples in the church. Following national adoption by the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), the revised preamble was then taken to each Synod and Presbytery throughout 2010 in accordance with the UCA Constitution, before formally being implemented in 2012.

To understand the profound significance of the revised preamble to the Uniting Church, it needs to be placed into a historical context. Following a period of tension in the early 2000s, after the Uniting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Congress (UAICC or Congress) felt it had not been listened to or heard, Congress in 2003 suggested a process of revising the UCA's preamble to its Basis of Union. This began a process taking several years working toward repairing the relationship between UAICC and the wider Uniting Church. In response to the 2003 suggestion to revise the preamble, the church found itself with a meaningful opportunity to live out its call to seek renewal and reconciliation as a community of First and Second peoples with a shared destiny together, and *"to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God"* (Micha 6:8). In 2006, the UCA discerned that it would formally begin a process of creating a revised preamble. A nationwide consultation took place within the UAICC to learn from a First Peoples' perspective to decide what needed to be included in the revised preamble. The wider Uniting Church leadership was then consulted.

The revised preamble recognises that together, as Christians, we are one body in Christ called to be in fellowship with one another, in which we are reminded that *"if one member suffers, all suffer together with it"* (1 Corinthians 12:26). With the inclusion of the revised preamble into the Basis of Union, the Uniting

Church affirmed the belief that we are called to enter more deeply into relationships of reconciliation, and in so doing, live out a fuller expression of our own reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Toward this end, neither is the UAICC apart from, nor separate to, the Uniting Church as a whole. In equal measure, Congress is included in the same Christian fellowship that constitutes the Uniting Church in Australia. At the same time, principles of self-determination are integral to the structure and operation of the UAICC's mission and ministry in the life of the church. By recognising and honouring the unique self-determined Christian identity of Congress within the Uniting Church, the whole church celebrates the call to honour diversity that is essential to the Christian faith. Another reason for revising the preamble was to further the unique ecumenical expression of the Uniting Church that called its three founding Christian denominations into union in 1977 to fit an Australian context.



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The Uniting Church aims to be a uniquely Australian church on this land now called Australia, that is answerable for its own colonial roots, rather than being a European church that came to this place as an extension of the Christian faith through colonialism. Through its union of the Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist traditions, the Uniting Church was able to express an ecumenical call to continuously seek reconciliation and renewal on earth, which is now understood to also be reflected in its life and ministry as a community of First and Second peoples. Together, the preamble calls us to celebrate the Covenantal relationship “as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.” The revised preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution is [available online](#)

## What does the preamble say about First Peoples’ Sovereignty?

The 2009 revised preamble makes it clear that a definition of First Peoples’ Sovereignty is a distinction left to First Peoples to define: “*Through this land God has 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.*” Because we are called to work together in a Spirit of reconciliation which we call **Covenanting**, this includes an ongoing commitment to learn from each other. The Uniting Church now understands First Peoples’ Sovereignty to be how it is expressed in the 2017 **Uluru Statement from the Heart**, which says sovereignty is a “...*spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.*”

## What does the preamble say about truth-telling?

The preamble acknowledges the church’s complicity in suppressing Aboriginal spirituality and Aboriginal experiences of God. The preamble further acknowledges the church’s role in colonisation more broadly, including its complicity 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.” In naming injustices, the preamble is an act of truth-telling and agreement-making, mutually agreed upon by both First and Second peoples in the pursuit of justice and biblically informed reconciliation.

## How does theology apply to truth-telling in the preamble?

Through the Preamble, the Church acknowledges and affirms that First Peoples had already encountered God before the arrival of the colonisers. This means we now understand that First Peoples had witnessed the Spirit as already existing within the land according to their own customs, spirituality and lore. Theologically, this means that there is much for Second Peoples to learn from First People’s understandings and experience of the Creator God, without assuming that a Euro-centric theology contains all that is to be known about God.



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



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