

The Covenant & Covenanting FAQ

You may already be familiar with the word 'Covenant', as the Bible teaches us that God is bound in a relationship with people called a covenant relationship, and that through Jesus Christ a New Covenant was formed to reconcile us to God. The special relationship between First and Second peoples in the Uniting Church is also called a Covenant to reflect the sacred undertaking of being bound together, under God, to seek a shared destiny together in the life of the Church and nation.

The Covenant relationship between First and Second peoples in the Uniting Church found its beginning when the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC or Congress) was formed in 1985 as a unique and self-determined expression of a First Peoples Christian identity. This new relationship sought to be built upon a shared understanding of the significant contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to the Church and Australia. After a period of time discerning how the Uniting Church and the UAICC would be in a relationship together, one of the founding UAICC leaders, [Rev. Charles Harris](#), suggested entering into a formal Covenant between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as a commitment to a renewed relationship of reconciliation.

The Covenant relationship between UAICC and the Uniting Church was entered into on July 10th during the 7th Assembly of the Uniting Church in 1994. Entering into the Covenant together was a step for the whole Church towards building an intentional relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples built on an equal partnership that was not bound by colonial or paternalistic ideas and policies. It was, and still is, a commitment to jointly share in the struggle for a more just and equitable society, in and outside of the Church.

At the meeting of the 7th Assembly of the Uniting Church, two statements were read aloud by the leaders of the UCA and UAICC. First, UCA President Jill Talbart read a statement to the UAICC National Chairperson Bill Hollingsworth, who then responded. Jointly, these two statements embody the spirit of the

Covenant and how it should be lived out in the life of the church. Together, these two statements are called the 'Covenanting Statement'. The Covenanting Statement is published in the Uniting Church Constitution and Regulations, and can be [found online](#).

The Covenant is an intentional commitment proclaiming a willingness of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the Uniting Church to establish a relationship based upon meaningful recognition, justice and equality. Some key understandings about the Covenant are that it:

- enshrines a commitment to journey together as equals.
- acknowledges a relationship distorted by colonialism and its ongoing impact.
- commits us as Christians to a relationship reflecting compassion, justice and forgiveness within the context of a common faith.
- commits us to the sharing of different understandings of God, and to respect how this is expressed through a spiritual connection with the land spanning tens of thousands of years.
- commits us to addressing power imbalances within and outside of the church.
- commits us to adequate resourcing and the empowerment of Congress in-line with self-determination principals.

The **Covenant** is the agreement between First and Second Peoples in the Uniting Church to Walk Together in biblically informed reconciliation.

Covenanting is the living out of that agreement in the life of the Church.

Do there need to be First Nations people in my Congregation for Covenanting to happen?

No. Covenanting encourages meaningful relationships between First and Second peoples, and informs and enriches those relationships where they exist.



The Covenant & Covenanting FAQ

Covenanting still occurs without there being Indigenous people physically in the room, and you can actively include the Voice of First Nations' people by using secular and theological resources. Covenanting is also a personal journey, and everyone's journey is different. For non-Indigenous people, Covenanting has a strong emphasis on educating oneself by actively seeking out and listening deeply to what First People leaders and communities have to say.

Do I need to be in a direct relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress?

You already are. Members of the Uniting Church are already in a relationship with the UAICC through the Covenant. Understanding this relationship will require taking time to learn what the Covenant is, and how to live it out in your own context. Depending on what State or Territory you are in, there are UAICC congregations and faith communities you can worship with, and cultural centres you can visit. Victoria has a Congress Regional Council, and Tasmania has the Congress cultural and community centre of [Leprena](#).

Is Covenanting limited to only forming relationships between First and Second Peoples within the Uniting Church?

No. While the Covenant is an agreement that informs the structural relationship between the UCA and UAICC, in practice, Covenanting is a special call to all Uniting Church members to form meaningful relationships between First and Second peoples based on mutual understanding, justice and equality. As Christians, our faith informs our lives. Therefore, Covenanting should holistically inform our faith and our relationships between First and Second peoples both within and outside of the Church. However, people outside of the Uniting Church are unlikely to know what Covenanting is.

What is the difference between the Covenant and Covenanting?

It is helpful to think of the **Covenant** as an agreement that began in 1994 between First and Second peoples within the Uniting Church in the pursuit of biblically informed reconciliation. At the same time, **Covenanting** is the proactive and intentional way we go about living out the Covenant in the relationship between First and Second peoples in the Uniting Church, and which also informs how the Church and its members enter into relationship with First Nations peoples, organisations and institutions outside of the Church.

Where can I find resources to learn more about Covenanting?

Each Synod in the Uniting Church offers resources made in partnership with the UAICC, including the [Synod of Victoria and Tasmania](#) and [the Synod of NSW and ACT](#). The [Uniting Church Assembly](#) also offers a range of resources online.

A [Covenanting Pathways Toolkit](#) is also available for members of the Uniting Church of Victoria and Tasmania as a resource to help you on your Covenanting journey.



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



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



equipping Leadership for Mission
Justice & International Mission



UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS