



Acknowledgement of First Peoples



In the Uniting Church in Australia



An Acknowledgement of First Peoples is a way of paying respect to First Peoples whenever we gather together, such as the commencement of worship, meetings of boards, councils, committees, schools and agencies and other occasions when the Church gathers.

Why do we encourage this respectful practice?

We encourage the whole Uniting Church to listen deeply for what it means to walk together, First and Second Peoples, to lament the past and to seek to be a healing community, characterised by the love of Christ.

Acknowledgement is an important expression of:

- the covenant which the Uniting Church in Australia has with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC)
- the Preamble to our Uniting Church in Australia Constitution
- the affirmation by the 15th Assembly in 2018 of Aboriginal and Islander Australians as sovereign peoples in this land

What does it mean to Acknowledge Country?

Acknowledgement of Country:

- recognises the place of Indigenous people as the First Peoples of this land
- promotes awareness of the history and culture of the First Peoples
- formally acknowledges First Peoples ongoing connection to land

“Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country is a very important way of giving Aboriginal people back their place in society, and an opportunity for us to say, ‘We are real, we are here, and today we welcome you to our land’...It’s paying respect, in a formal sense, and following traditional custom in a symbolic way.”

- Joy Murphy Wandin, Wurundjeri Elder, *Australians Together*.



An Ancient Protocol

For thousands of years the protocols of welcoming visitors from other lands and country has been practiced within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. If you were crossing into someone else's country, it was a requirement to send a request to the land's people to be granted permission to enter and be offered safe passage and protection. This in turn required the visitor to acknowledge, adhere to and respect the rules of the country that was being entered.

Yawarllaayi/Gomeroi elder Barbara Flick Nicol says that these protocols have never disappeared, despite having gone through many shifts, especially within the last 200 years.

“Aboriginal people are always aware if they are in another people's country, and especially talking about land in other's country. At first it was a principle for us – it wasn't expressly stated, but there was an understanding that there was a traditional protocol - that went way back before the invasion of the country. If people wanted to (venture to other's lands), it was mostly men who wanted to have discussions with men from another country or nation – they would carry a message stick, asking properly.

That was the protocol that they could meet. It's always been something that we did as a people, understanding and observing the fact that when you are in somebody else's country, that you acknowledge them.”

Modern Practice

In 2010, Federal Parliament made the decision to open each session with an Acknowledgement of the Ngunnawal Clan-Nation. Today it is official protocol to begin Parliament with the Lord's Prayer **and** an Acknowledgement of Country.

The contemporary practise of Acknowledgement of Country began around the time of the 1992 Mabo decision. Today, on most public occasions and for government, business, education and health organisations, it is accepted protocol to begin with a Welcome by or Acknowledgement of the recognised traditional owners, the sovereign First Nation Peoples.

The Uniting Church in Australia's national council, the Assembly encourages congregations, schools, agencies and governing bodies to ensure a Welcome by, or an Acknowledgement of, First Peoples is given at the commencement of all gatherings and acts of worship.

*In this we honour our **covenant relationship** (1994), the **Revised Preamble to the Constitution** (2009) and our affirmation of **First Nation Peoples as sovereign** (2018).*





Welcome and Acknowledgement

A **Welcome to Country** is carried out by a recognised elder or appointed member of the traditional owner group. Generally, the Local Land Council or Aboriginal Community Organisation can assist with this.

An **Acknowledgement of Country** is where a leader in your community makes an acknowledgement of the local traditional owning Clan or Nation group as an affirmation of the sovereign First Peoples where your gathering is taking place.

What to do?

1

Step 1: Ascertain as best you can the name/s of the Clan/s or Nation applicable to your area.

2

Step 2: Be sensitive to local Indigenous communities and culture; e.g. because of connection with waters in your area the acknowledgement may need to be for the people “who have cared for the lands and waters”, where you are gathering.

3

Step 3: Several different forms of Acknowledgement are set out below. Select one and insert the name of your local Clan/s and or Nation.

How do I find the correct First Nation Peoples for my area?

The easiest way to find the correct First Nation Peoples to acknowledge is through a simple web search, for example **“Who are the Traditional Owners for Hornsby NSW”**

This may bring up a number of options which might be confusing. The best sites to follow are those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Local groups are best referred to as Clans. An alliance of clans covering a larger land and water mass is referred to as a Nation. Sometimes a large land area like the Hornsby Shire will have different clan groups for particular places for example, in the suburb of Turramurra the traditional owners are the Terramerragal Clan.

Another example of this can be found in the greater Sydney region. Norman Tindale in his revised 1974 Boundaries named all these various coastal northern Sydney Clans as part of the Eora Nation. Eora literally means people but came to mean Aboriginal people. This is similar to the various clans of North East Arnhemland who are known as Yolŋu. The literal meaning of Yolŋu is human beings, used now to refer to Aboriginal human beings.

Sometimes language group names are used incorrectly for Nation. In the example of the Hornsby Shire, whilst the traditional owners were members of the Dharug language group they should still be referred to as belonging to the Eora Nations.

Sydney is a very complex space because of the many clans which shared the plentiful Sydney basin before colonisation. Other places are not as complex. In Darwin NT, the traditional owners are members of the Larrakia Nation.

If you experience difficulty contact your local Aboriginal organisation and seek their understanding. You could also contact your Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) Regional Council and ask their advice. The Assembly Consultant Covenanting is available to offer support. Don't let a little research prevent you from proceeding in this very important aspect of affirming First Nation Peoples.



WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS
OF THE LAND ON WHICH WE GATHER

GADIGAL PEOPLE OF THE EORA NATION

WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THEIR ELDERS
PAST AND PRESENT
AND ALL THEIR DESCENDANTS

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
COVENANT WITH THE
UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS



The Covenanting Painting

This painting tells a sacred Creation story of the Wagalak sisters and speaks particularly of the alliance of four Clan Nations and their responsibilities for the land and waters of their yirralka (estates).

The painting also depicts the sacred ground where ceremonies take place and in particular the Wukindi ceremony, to restore relationship when blood is spilt and bring reconciliation.

The painting is in itself an initiation for UCA members to stand with members of the UAICC in their struggle for justice.

UCA President Dr Jill Tabart received this painting from UAICC Chairperson Pastor Bill Hollingsworth on the occasion of the Covenanting agreement at the 7th UCA Assembly meeting in Sydney in 1994.

Our Journey - UAICC and UCA

- 1985 UAICC recognised at 4th Assembly
- 1985 First Indigenous Moderator Rev Dr Djinyini Gondarra
- 1988 Rev Charles Harris leads Bicentennial protests
- 1994 UAICC-UCA Covenanting agreement
- 1997 Uniting Church formally apologises to Stolen Generations
- 2009 Revised preamble to the UCA Constitution acknowledges God's revelation to First Peoples before colonisation
- 2014 A Destiny Together rally at Parliament House
- 2015 - (ongoing) UAICC-UCA Sovereignty / Treaty conversations

Consider purchasing a banner

The Assembly has art work available on its [website](#) which can be used to commission a pull-up banner acknowledging the First Peoples in your area and our Covenant.

What to say?

For general occasions

1. We acknowledge the sovereign First Peoples of these lands and waters where we meet, the Peoples (of the Nation/s). We pay our respects to their elders past and present and to all descendants of this/these Nation/s who have cared for this place since creation.

We also honour all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here today.

2. This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the People, traditional custodians of this land under God. We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

3. As we gather in this place, we give thanks for the People.

We acknowledge the commitment their ancestors made, across the generations, to nurturing this Land. Together, may we walk into the future, recognising the sacred footsteps that continue to lead us to the promise of Heaven.

4. For this Land - We give thanks!

For the First Peoples - We give thanks!

We honour the custodians of sacred stories, of dreamings and the connections with the deep earth and oceans.

May we work together for the restoration of the Land and Sea and Her Peoples.

When the focus is on the creation

1. From before recorded time, the First Peoples of the Nation cared for this Land. We praise the Creator for the beauty of this Land and honour those who have cared for it.

We acknowledge the Elders and community members who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator.

We ask God's blessing on those who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this Land and Her Communities.

2. **Leader:** We acknowledge the.....People, the first inhabitants of this place, part of God's good creation. We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

People: You set humanity at the heart of your creation, O God; charging us with stewardship of all you have made. We give thanks for those who have heeded your call.

3. As we look upon the hills and valleys, we see the love poured out upon this Land by those who have cared for this Land since time beyond measure.

We honour those who have gone before and those who are yet to come.

May we be mindful of the calling God places on humanity to care for Creation.

May we take the lead from the People, whose stories are entwined with the stewarding of this place. May we learn from them and walk with them.

At Pentecost

The Ancient of Days breathed life into this Land and her Peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the People have blessed this place through their care and concern.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders, past and present, and pray for the future of their communities. May we walk gently and respectfully on this Land.

On national days

This is God's Land

Many have gone before who have honoured God by caring for the Land, in the ways they have lived and in the stories they have shared.

We give thanks for the People, who have held as sacred the duty of protecting the Land and living in harmony with it.

May God honour and bless them - now and to eternity.

Where the church or venue is near to a known site of Aboriginal celebration

We acknowledge that the site of this church is in walking distance of which is the site of ceremony and ritual of the People, the traditional custodians of this region.

We are awed that they recognised and celebrated the religious significance of place and all creation; and that care for the earth was implanted in their law.

We honour them for this. And we look for and delight in the sacred in our midst.

We pray that in the power of the Holy Spirit we might work together for reconciliation and justice in this land.

For general occasions, or in an outdoor setting

From river to ocean, from campfire to hearth, may the First People who have cared for this Land be blessed.

From breath to song, from step to dance, may those who follow your Songlines* (ancient stories) guide us on the journey of living honourably in this place.

From greeting to Amen, from silence to chorus, may our worship join with the voices of the First Peoples of this Land.

**Songlines - For some communities of Indigenous Australians, a songline, also called dreaming track, is one of the paths across the land (or sometimes the sky) which mark the route followed by localised 'creator-beings' during the Dreaming. The paths of the songlines are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance, and painting.*

A knowledgeable person is able to navigate across the land by repeating the words of the song, which describe the location of landmarks, waterholes, and other natural phenomena. In some cases, the paths of the creator-beings are said to be evident from their marks, or petrosomatoglyphs, on the land, such as large depressions in the land which are said to be their footprints.

In worship which uses visual symbols

A rock is placed before the people

Over eons the earth has settled and formed. The colours merge and the stories entwine.

May those who have kept the stories of God's earth be honoured.

Water is placed before the people

The flow of life ripples, finding cracks and crevices. It glistens and sparkles with promise.

May those who quench a spiritual thirst be blessed.

A candle or fire is lit

Darkness is banished with the sharing of light.

Relationships enlighten and corruption dissipates.

May the Light of the World be carried in the hearts of the people of God.

The people stretch out their hands, palms upward

We reach out to God and to one another.

May God remake us as a Covenant People,

Bound together by the Spirit of this Land and guided by Her First Peoples.



For general occasions, on national days, in celebrations of ancient peoples

In the Dreaming, the Spirit of God brought forth the blessing of Ancient Life through Mother Earth.

Ground Beings were given breath and rhythm, the offspring of the heart of God!

This place was tended by the People of this Ground and this Land's rhythms. We give thanks for their custodianship and honour their Elders - past, present and future.

Other acknowledgements

Rev. Dr Amelia Koh-Butler has a number of Acknowledgements which can be used which are available on [her website](#).

Other Languages

Our cultural diversity as a community of Christ means we are enriched by the languages and cultures which God's Spirit has drawn together. [On our website](#) you can find Acknowledgements in many of the languages used most Sundays in the UCA.





A Longer Acknowledgement of Country, based on the Revised Preamble (2012) to the Constitution

Today, as we gather to worship, we acknowledge the Peoples, the first inhabitants of this place from time beyond remembering.

We acknowledge that through this land, God nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples.

We honour them for their custodianship of the land on which we gather today.

We acknowledge that 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.

We acknowledge that 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; and so we rejoice in the reconciling purposes of God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.



**Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY**



**UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS**

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