

Today we celebrate the 43rd anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia and we give thanks to God.

Light your candle



The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

The candle is a symbol of the light of Christ.

Watch the dancing flame; vulnerable to the breezes but defiant against the dark. In such a way, let your light shine.

Call to worship

God who brings light to the darkness and life to us all, be with us today as you are with us always. Bless us as we gather alone or in small groups, as the body of Christ, your church. Send your Spirit to inspire our reading, praying, remembering, wondering and celebrating.

May it be so, Amen.

Acknowledgement to Country

We all gather on the lands and by the waters of the First Peoples of this place:

As we pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging we acknowledge that the church has not always been a sign of hope and healing in this land. We commit ourselves again to speak truth and to seek reconciliation.



*Uniting Aboriginal and Islander
Christian Congress*

Hymn: All people that on earth do dwell TiS 59

All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
him serve with mirth
his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make:
we are his folk, he doth us feed,
and for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise,
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

For why the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

William Kethe d.1594 alt.

Prayers of thankfulness

Were you there at the beginning of the UCA, and even before that in one of the uniting denominations? Do you remember the bold dreams that came to fruition? Do you remember the struggles to get to the birthing?

Do you remember the celebrations?

Or have you come to this church in the years since union? Do you remember what led you here? Or are you just dropping in, wondering who we are and what we're on about? Fabulous! Welcome!

Whenever you came, whatever you recall – you are here, now! Spend a few minutes in thankful remembering, offering to God the memories and good stories that come to you, offering thankfulness that you are here, now, worshiping together apart, with all God's people in the Uniting Church and beyond.

The Gospel Reading

Read Matthew 10:27-31

**Prayers of confession
and an assurance of forgiveness.**

God of light and life,
as a church and as your disciples
we have not always listened to your whispers,
we have not always turned towards your light,
we have not always trusted you to lead us.

Have mercy on our fear and our frailty, our
hesitance and our neglect of the ways of Christ.
Help us to accept and take up our mission in
the world and to live and speak and act as
those who truly belong to you.

Hear these words of assurance;
Our longing to draw closer to God is met with
God's outreaching embrace.
We are loved, healed, released and forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

A reading

Read Genesis 21:8-21

**The Inaugural Statement to the Nation of
The Uniting Church in Australia
June 22, 1977**

**People of the Congregational, Methodist
and Presbyterian Churches have united. A
new church has been born.**

**We, who are members of the first
Assembly of the Uniting Church in
Australia address the people of Australia
in this historic moment. The path to unity
has been long and at times difficult, but
we believe this unity is a sign of the
reconciliation we seek for the whole
human race.**

**We acknowledge with gratitude that the
churches from which we have come have
contributed in various ways to the life and
development of this nation. A Christian
responsibility to society has always been**

**regarded as fundamental to the mission
of the Church. In the Uniting Church our
response to the Christian gospel will
continue to involve us in social and
national affairs.**

**We are conscious of our responsibilities
within and beyond this country. We
particularly acknowledge our
responsibilities as one branch of the
Christian church within the region of
South-East Asia and the Pacific. In these
contexts we make certain affirmations at
the time of our inauguration.**

**We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic
Christian values and principles, such as
the importance of every human being, the
need for integrity in public life, the
proclamation of truth and justice, the
rights for each citizen to participate in
decision-making in the community,
religious liberty and personal dignity, and
a concern for the welfare of the whole
human race.**

**We pledge ourselves to seek the
correction of injustices wherever they
occur. We will work for the eradication of
poverty and racism within our society and
beyond. We affirm the rights of all people
to equal educational opportunities,
adequate health care, freedom of speech,
employment or dignity in unemployment
if work is not available. We will oppose all
forms of discrimination which infringe
basic rights and freedoms.**

**We will challenge values which emphasise
acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of
the needs of others and which encourage
a higher standard of living for the
privileged in the face of the daily widening
gap between the rich and poor.**

**We are concerned with the basic human
rights of future generations and will urge**

the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.

Finally we affirm that the first allegiance of Christians is God, under whose judgment the policies and actions of all nations must pass. We realise that sometimes this allegiance may bring us into conflict with the rulers of our day. But our Uniting Church, as an institution within the nation, must constantly stress the universal values which must find expression in national policies if humanity is to survive.

We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere — the family of the One God — the God made known in Jesus of Nazareth the One who gave His life for others. In the spirit of His self-giving love we seek to go forward.

REFLECTION Uniting Church Anniversary

“People of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches have united. A new church has been born”.

What an exciting opening this was in the Statement to the Nation in June 1977. This is a radical document (as is the Basis of Union). It acknowledges the difficulties of seeking unity as a sign of the reconciliation for all. It calls us to the responsibility of participation in the affairs of our nation and beyond. It, in fact, calls us to “eagerness” in the upholding of our values such as the dignity of all. We pledge in this great document, to seek justice and to challenge anything which impinges on this or causes discrimination. It addresses gaps

between rich and poor, decries any sense of privilege of one over another, it seeks adequate health care and education, the rights of the environment and even the human rights of future generations. Because of this it mentions energy use and other resources. It is truly a remarkable document. It is to be noted that it neglects to mention the First Peoples, which has been the subject of much discussion (most recently in an excellent discussion book by Andrew Dutney, “Angels in this Wilderness”). The journey of the UCA over time has allowed us to make changes and seek to address this injustice and walk alongside our First Peoples in covenant together. The final lines of the statement call us to self-giving love in the interests of others and it pledges us to live in hope.

Are we living up to the call of this document? Are we still something new and different? There have been so many joys and struggles over the years. So many times we have had to reassess and weigh up how we incorporate various points of view.

One of the tensions has been the polarisation of social justice interests and evangelism. Even with some first-hand experiences of this tension (so I know well its existence), I don't understand it and believe it to be a construct. Some have felt we have not done mission well and I believe that there is some truth in this because the church's very existence IS for mission. When she is true to her being, the Church crosses boundaries of all kinds, culture, race and nation. She fulfils her call when she is a missionary Church and otherwise she falls back into the sin of “grasping as her own what she is called to receive as a gift to be used in the service of others” (1, p. 99). We move as church, out

across the boundaries and barriers, out to the margins. Mission has had a bit of a bad rap because of its ties to colonisation and the tendency to impose itself. Mission is not what we proclaim in words but how we love and serve. This is our worship. Words can sometimes accompany this (this is good news for those of us who struggle to put it all into words!). The place for the church is on the margins where the people who 'live it tough' dwell. These are the people Jesus loved, "the lame, poor, blind, prostitutes, drunkards, tax collectors, and foreigners. He lived in close proximity to and in solidarity with the excluded ones in his society" (2). It was the rich and powerful who shunned him, those on the inner circles of power. Before very long the church became powerful and favoured, and it changed its position and stance. Who do we favour, and live in solidarity with today?

History is often recorded from the perspective of the dominant and victorious, and yet the Bible is largely written from the point of view of the oppressed. I had read the story about Abraham and Hagar and Sarah many times and not thought too much of it except as another story of the faithfulness of God to the promises Abraham received. And then one day I read it from the point of view of Hagar and was horrified (and still am)! God is imaged over and over again in Scripture as protector of the lowly and disadvantaged. And yet this chosen people was built on a story of oppression toward an underage girl and the baby born in despicable circumstances. The 'chosen-ness' of one privileged child came at the expense of the deep suffering of another! The self-serving desires of one powerful mother came at the cost of the suffering of

one with no power. God graciously provided care for Hagar and Ishmael and their story continues with the presence of God continuing to be with them.

Where does this story sit with those of us who later chose to follow the baby born in another set of difficult circumstances? One whose young unwed mother sang of the lowly being lifted up, and of the reversals in power dynamic to come in and through God's kingdom. Variations of Hagar's story are repeated over and over again in our times and we are called as the church to be there caring for mother and baby and all who dwell in the toughness of life's challenges, to continue to be God's presence journeying with them. This is our mission. This is who we are as church. This the Uniting Church, pledged to "seek the correction of injustice", to live out our mission as the people of God. When we read the Bible in solidarity with the marginalised we are liberated and transformed and empowered to live out our faith in social justice and evangelism, as Christians...together. Happy Birthday Uniting Church may you continue to be graced by the leading of the Spirit and go forward in God's self-giving love!

Sermon notes

1. Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia (Eds Rob Bos and Geoff Thompson)
2. Richard Rohr daily notes Sunday 24th May, 2020 (Centre for Action and Contemplation)

Song: We are your people TIS 468

We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us
to all our neighbours
Christ's living voice, hands and face.

Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover
gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led

Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours,
open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing,
where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting,
waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

Christ as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

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Prayers of the People

Prepare your prayer space with 4 glasses of water and a jug:

When Hagar had run out of water
When Hagar had given up, and had no hope
She sat and lifted up her voice and tears to God
God, open our eyes.
<pour the water into the glass>
Help us see you, the source of Life

For the leaders of our Nation in these difficult times
May our state premiers be wise as they guide our localities
For international diplomacy and wisdom
For peace between the nations: and fair and justice for all
God, open our eyes.
<pour the water into the glass>
Help us see you, the source of Life

For the children sick, abandoned through illness or superstition.
For those separated from family, across locked borders
For people awaiting elective surgery: managing pain, in pain,
For all who care, support and help
God, open our eyes.
<pour the water into the glass>
Help us see you, the source of Life

For our community agencies: Uniting Community workers in Uniting Age Well
Our hospitals and their staff at The Epworth
For our Uniting Church School recommending: their staff and Principals
God, open our eyes.
<pour the water into the glass>
Help us see you, the source of Life

Take a drink of water from this last glass:
May the waters of refreshment and hope fill our lives
And bring life to our world.

And we share the prayer Jesus taught his disciples
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

*Keep the other three glasses of water for
the benediction.*

Sharing of the Peace

Take a moment and share the peace with
our Synod office. Write a Happy Birthday
message. You might begin with "On our
43rd birthday, this is what I'm celebrating
about the Uniting Church ...

Make sure you tell them where you're
from, on a local postcard if you like, and
send some love from the Presbytery of
Gippsland, or wherever you are!

The Moderator, The Rev. Denise Liersch
Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
130 Little Collins St, Melbourne 3000
or email moderator@victas.uca.org.au

Hymn: Now thank we all our God TIS 106

Now thank we all our God
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom the world rejoices;
who from our mother's arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us.
Lord, keep us in your grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all harm
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
who reigns in highest heaven,
to Father and to Son
and Spirit now be given:
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
who ever was, is now,
and shall be ever more.

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Martin Rinkart 1586-1649.
tr. Catherine Winkworth 1827-78 alt.

BLESSING

*Pour a cup of water back into the jug for
each of the denominations that came
together to form the Uniting Church.*

For the life of the Congregationalists

Thanks be to God

For the life of the Methodists

Thanks be to God

For the life of the Presbyterians

Thanks be to God

For the life of the Uniting Church and her
many expressions of the ministry of Christ
that we share.

Thanks be to God

Go knowing that you are precious to God.
Share this blessing you have been given
by the way you live and love in the world.
Make peace. Speak truth. Shine the light.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

