

A GUIDE TO CONGREGATIONS IN
**Walking Together as First
and Second Peoples**



Walking Together

The Uniting Church in Western Australia is inviting congregations to engage more deeply in this journey of covenanting. The key aspects of this journey are reflected in: deep listening, creating and broadening of relationships between First and Second Peoples, taking responsibility for justice and truth telling, and ensuring that the voices of First Peoples are heard and respected within the leadership of the Church and its Councils.

This journey of walking together as First and Second Peoples is our Synod's expression of the Covenant between the UAICC and the UCA.

What is the Covenant?

In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

In 1988 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia heard* God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever-deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

So the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

(excerpt from the UCA Preamble to the Constitution).

Covenanting in the Uniting Church in WA

The work of Covenanting in Western Australia has been going on for many years. The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress of WA and the Uniting Church WA would like to pay special tribute to the foundational work of key people like the late Rev Sealin Garlett AM and the Rev Dr Alison Longworth. Their efforts helped to lay the groundwork for our Covenanting Journey, including the establishment of the Covenanting Commission who have produced this Covenanting Guide.

*The original word in the Preamble is 'discovered'

This Covenanting Guide....

Within the following pages, you will find various activities that you and your community could undertake to deepen your Covenant journey. Some of these activities you will be able to complete within your own community, others will invite you to seek out the First Peoples of your area and listen to what they have to tell you.

Some actions will encourage a change in the way you approach certain activities within your worship, congregational or agency life. Other suggestions will invite you to step out into the public life of our state and nation and take a stand on matters of justice for the First Peoples of this land.

The purpose of this Guide is...

- to continue to encourage one another and the Councils of the UCA to affirm and re-commit to the Covenant with the UAICC,
- to continue to encourage the building of relationships with local First Peoples communities where our Congregations, Presbyteries and Synod are located,
- to continue to educate the Church,
- to continue to encourage the Church to engage and deepen relationships between First and Second Peoples,
- to continue to inspire the Church to take action, make commitments and instigate change.

There is a sample Covenanting Action Plan for congregations to use to work through the sections in this guide.

Resources to enhance your journey can be found on the Synod Website at this link:

- ▶ <https://unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/social-justice/first-peoples/>

You are invited as you engage in your chosen activities to:



Listen deeply

Take responsibility for justice and truth telling



Develop relationships

Keep the Covenant at the heart of the Church's everyday life



Cultural awareness

Listen Deeply

Growing a deeper understanding of First Peoples and their culture.



Identifying and respecting Elders

Find out who the local Elders are in your community and seek out opportunities to build relationships.



Language Matters

Take the time to learn local history and incorporate local language and place names in congregation communications.



Walk on Country

Identify an opportunity to Walk on Country led by local First Peoples or Congress.



Learning Indigenous theology

Seek out opportunities to listen, learn and understand the lived experience of First Peoples integrating Indigenous Spirituality with Christian theology.



Observing and respecting local protocols

Consult with local First Peoples to ensure meeting spaces are safe and welcoming.

Decolonising

Take responsibility for justice and truth telling

There is important work to do to identify and understand the often unrealised cultural viewpoint of non-Aboriginal Australians and the non-Aboriginal church.



Understanding white privilege and the colonial mindset

Engage in Truth Telling - hear stories from First Peoples communities and traditional owner organisations to understand the impacts of colonisation on First Nations Peoples and enter into intentional dialogue.



Role of the Church

Learn the role of the church, its theology and practice in the history of Australia and its dealings with First Peoples



Read

Encourage members to read and reflect on texts of significance. Eg. Dark Emu, Charles Harris Biography

Develop Relationships

Build relationships by reaching out to members of UAICC, First Peoples in your community & local Aboriginal-run organisations.



Connect

Reach out to members of UAICC, First Peoples in your community & local Aboriginal-run organisations for learning and relationship building.



Actively Engage in the Community

Visit and promote First Peoples' organisations and events. Find ways for your congregation to actively engage with local events, activities and groups run with and/or by First Peoples in the community. Eg. NAIDOC Week, the Beananging Kwuurt Institute, Surrender.



Invite

Invite First Peoples to safe discussions and events where they have the opportunity to freely speak, remembering to offer payment for cultural knowledge and services.

Practical Covenanting

Keep the Covenant at the heart of the Church's everyday life

Embedding intentions into regular practice.



Signage

Install visible signage in and around your congregation that acknowledges the local Aboriginal people e.g. the UCA revised preamble poster, UCA covenant poster, Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners. (see <https://uniting.church/covenanting/>)



Acknowledgement

Begin all meetings and worship with an Acknowledgement of Country



Key Dates

Mark key dates in the congregation calendar such as Sorry Day, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, Day of Mourning



Advocate

Support advocacy efforts to achieve policy change e.g. Uluru statement from the Heart, Social Reinvestment WA

Practical Covenanting

(cont.)

Embedding intentions into regular practice.



Financial Support

Provide regular financial contributions to Aboriginal organisations or directly to Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress WA



Ongoing Learning

Join the 'Walking Together' Assembly Circle (<https://uniting.church/walkingtogether/>)



Prayer

Pray regularly for the members and ministry of Congress and for all First Peoples.



Progress

Establish regular meetings and/or reporting to your church council to ensure progress on your Congregational Covenanting Action Plan

Congregation Covenanting Action Plan Guide

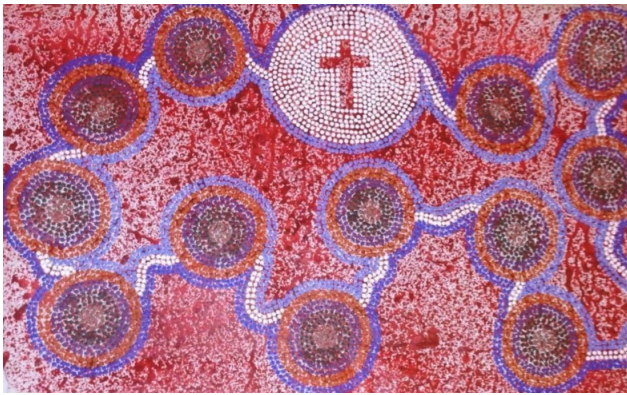
As a congregation, note some ways for you to move through your own Covenanting Action Plan considering each of these areas. Remember to allocate time frames to work within, and people in the congregation to take a leadership role on actions.

Cultural Awareness - listen deeply.

Decolonising - take responsibility for justice and truth telling.

Develop Relationships

Practical Covenanting - keep the Covenant at the heart of the Church's everyday life



The Artwork

by Cheryl Lawson Resource Worker UAICC WA
Nyungar Yorga of the Wadjak Clan

It tells a story of the Nyungar People in this area and how they have traveled from area to area to seek shelter, water and food. Through everything their connection to God was always there, He sustained them, provided for them and shelters them.

The background represents the Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ shed on the Cross for us all and we as Gods children walk together as one in Christ.

Key Terms

The Covenant – While a covenant broadly means an agreement, the Covenant when applied to the Uniting Church context with First Peoples specifically refers to an agreement entered into in 1994 between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress

Covenanting - Covenanting is the unique call to reconciliation and renewal within the life Uniting Church of Australia, and is the coming together of First and Second Peoples to form meaningful and respectful relationship as an act of faith.

Preamble (to the Uniting Church Constitution) – The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to a relationships which fosters just, inclusive and equal relationships, recognising the place of First Peoples in Australia. To acknowledge this, revisions to the Preamble of the Uniting Church Constitution were developed and adopted after extensive consultation throughout the Church and UAICC over 2009 and 2010.

UAICC, or Congress – Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia, and members in fellowship who may also be members of any other denomination, seeking to fulfil their calling as Christians among their own people.

“We pray that through your use of this Covenanting Guide you may deepen your understanding of Aboriginal people and culture, and your understanding of the God who sustained our people through this land over countless generations.”

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress WA

Prepared by the Covenanting Action Plan Working Group, under the auspices of the Synod of Western Australia Contact:

Geoffrey.Bice@wa.uca.org.au

Resources for the journey: **<https://unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/social-justice/first-peoples/>**Credit for Images used:

Grace Williams (graphic design elements), Cheryl Lawson (cover image).