

## Hearing from the Heart: A Service and Resources

In 1994, the Uniting Church of Australia made a commitment to:

- work in solidarity with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) for the advancement of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness;
- advocate for national and state policy changes to redress structural disadvantage; and
- respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination.

In the Covenanting Statement to the UAICC Chairperson, the President of the Seventh Assembly said:

*Long before my people came to this land your people were here. You were nurtured by your traditions, by the land, and by the Mystery that surrounds us all and binds all creation together.*

*My people did not hear you when you shared your understanding and your Dreaming.*

Centuries and decades later, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still asking to be heard. Later this year, a Referendum will be held to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in Australia's Constitution.

The Uniting Church of Australia supports the proposal. Our current Assembly President, Reverend Hollis, has described the Voice to Parliament as a moral and theological issue, not a political one: *"Like Jesus, we are called to be bearers of justice, not just in our words, but in our actions and by changing systems which continue to deny the place and rights of the first Australians."*

This document contains resources, prayers and reflections that have been collated by the Social Justice Commission of the Western Australian Synod to assist worship communities to reflect on what it means to be "bearers of justice" in relation to the upcoming Referendum.

Worship communities are encouraged to use this resource to organise a service around the theme of "Hearing from the Heart". The service can be held in any week before the Referendum which is which will take place on 14 October 2023.

At the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA, the Covenanting Commission brought this worship resource before the meeting, commending to Synod the resources assembled by Daniel Vujcich, from the Social Justice Commission for congregations and other places of worship to feel free to use in worship services leading up to the Voice referendum. This was approved by the Synod in session.

In addition, we encourage the following actions:

### **Learn, discuss and reflect**

- Visit <https://uniting.church/voice/> and <https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/social-impact/first-nations-resources/> to learn more about the Uniting Church of Australia's position on the Voice
- Host a "Listen to the Heart" event at your Church using the resources developed by Common Grace: [https://www.listentotheheart.org.au/host\\_an\\_event](https://www.listentotheheart.org.au/host_an_event)
- Read *Statements from the Soul: The Moral Case for the Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Available: <https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/statements-soul>
- Gather to reflect, using the following resources as guides for discussion:
  - <https://www.tearfund.org.au/resources/voice-campaign-church-discussion-guide>
  - <https://www.abmission.org/resources/a-voice-in-the-wilderness/>

### **Provide support**

- Donate to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Yes23 campaign: <https://yes23.com.au/donate>

### **Spread the message**

- Engage an Indigenous business (using the directory <https://supplnation.org.au/>) to print a banner to display at your Church using the banner template available at <https://uniting.church/voice/>
- Download and display Facebook covers, Twitter headers, Instagram templates and email signatures to show your support: <https://uniting.church/voice/>
- Purchase official badges, stickers, T-shirts and corflutes (yard signs) to spread the message: <https://yes23.com.au/shop>

As is always the case, worship communities are encouraged to create spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to actively participate in - and guide the creation of - culturally appropriate and meaningful experiences of fellowship. However, we are also called to heed the words of Meredith Walker-Harding's Prayer for Voice and Justice:

*... in the midst of what will be an exhausting year, remind our Aboriginal and Torres Strait brothers and sisters that it is ok to rest, to take care of themselves, that their day to day lives are important to you, that you love them and want them to flourish.*

**A service in the lead-up to the Referendum to establish an  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice**

**'Hearing from the Heart'**

WELCOME TO COUNTRY OR ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

CALL TO WORSHIP

Oh Pulse of Life, Oh Heartbeat of all Creation;  
As we gather together this day around this large continent;  
**May we enrich each other as our journey's come together,**

As we listen deeply with respect;  
**May we take what we glean and enrich the communities we return to,**

As we recognise the injustices (past and present);  
**May we offer our voices and to question their root causes,**

As we become aware of the inequalities that exist;  
**May we actively respond to the needs that are hurting our fellow traveller,**

As we come to appreciate the cultural and spiritual wisdom among the Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander peoples,  
**May we marvel at You more and more,**

As we consider the value of the ground under our feet and the fruits that it produces,  
**May we take steps to nourish and nurture the earth, air and waters,**

As we strengthen our resolve to support Your work through Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Sisters and Brothers;  
**May we see the blessings of the kingdom unfold across this entire continent  
And rejoice together at the beauty found there.  
Amen.**

*(Lea Maslen, Common Grace)*

SONG

(Suggestions)

TIS #5 *Justice alone is the way of the Lord* **OR**

TIS #6 *Lord, hear a cause that is just*

OPENING PRAYER

God of wondrous possibility  
Take my story and my life  
Give me courage to stand for justice

God of dreaming and mystery  
Forgive my blind complaining  
Give me vision to walk remembering your history

God of truth and love  
Take my bruised hands and feet  
Give me strength and grace to stand for truth

God of safety and singing  
Take my mouth and my voice  
Give me words to inspire and encourage

God of knowledge and creativity  
Take my whole being  
Help me stretch, broaden and deepen

God of goodness and hope  
Take my connections and influence  
And help me stand for Voice and Justice  
Amen

*(Safina Stewart, Prayer for the Voice)*

## INTRODUCTION TO THEME

In the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates described a Voice to Parliament as the next logical step in a long journey for justice and recognition: “In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard.” Six years have passed since that gentle and generous invitation to “walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.” Later this year, a constitutional referendum will determine whether that vision for a better future is realised.

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Comensoli, describes the Uluru Statement as a gift but notes:

*A gift, however, only has value if there is a receiver who welcomes it openly and humbly. The exchange then becomes an act of love. ... Jesus said, ‘Look, I am standing at the door knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal with that person and that person with me.’ ... That sense, of a friend coming to meet us, even in difficult circumstances, offers a way forward in understanding the meaning of the Statement’s words and intent. This is the form, the living heart, of the Statement (from, Statements from the Soul: The Moral Case for the Uluru Statement from the Heart).*

The 2023 Referendum is not about party politics. It is a request from a persecuted but proud minority to have their voice heard on the lands from which they have been dispossessed.

This is a recurring theme in our Scriptures whose pages are filled with marginalised people straining to have their voices heard. The miracle of the Christian faith is that God sent a Messiah who taught us to listen to these voices with open hearts, and to create spaces for us to have dialogues with those whose lives and liberties have been pushed into the margins.

## CHILDREN'S RESOURCES

Consider purchasing Thomas Mayor's *Finding Our Heart: A Story about the Uluru Statement for young Australians*, or watch this video in which the author reads the story: <https://youtu.be/jyvCPAmOoTU>

## SCRIPTURE

### **Psalm 130:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD; my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.

### **Isaiah 65:19-24**

<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and delight in my people;  
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it  
or the cry of distress.

<sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime,  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

<sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

<sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat,  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
23 They shall not labor in vain  
or bear children for calamity,<sup>[c]</sup>  
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—  
and their descendants as well.  
24 Before they call I will answer,  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

### **Matthew 13:13-15**

13 The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' 14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: '*You will indeed listen but never understand, and you will indeed look but never perceive.*' 15 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they might not look with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.'*

### REFLECTION

God who listens,  
open our hearts to hear the gentle invitation of those without a voice;  
placeless and dispossessed of all that was theirs,  
instead of anger, revenge or blame,  
they offer in their open hand absurd generosity,  
an act of transformational forgiveness  
from the centre of their being to ours:

May we sense the integrity of country speaking to country, body to body;  
and find within ourselves the humility to accept and journey together,  
to become our nation's better future,  
resolving our colonial memory, Australia's original sin.

As Jesus gave his body for ours,  
help us to receive and pass on this gift of new life,  
for his name's sake. Amen.

(Glenn Loughrey 2023)

### SONG

(Suggestions)

TIS #2 *When I call, answer me, O God of justice* **OR**

TIS #71a *I love the Lord who has heard my prayer* **OR**

TIS #597 *Master, speak, Thy servant heareth*

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Before you our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,  
We remember that we stand on holy ground  
We acknowledge the stories of this land  
We acknowledge the peoples of this land  
We acknowledge the lore of this land  
We acknowledge the languages of this land  
We acknowledge that this land and her peoples are in need of healing

Give us compassion  
to hear and to feel the pain of lives torn apart  
to hear and feel the pain of land that is damaged  
and mistreated - sold to the highest bidder

Give us conviction  
to name where we benefit from the dispossession of First Peoples  
to see where injustice has taken hold  
and to not look away

Give us the courage  
to listen, to see, to feel, to name  
the pain,  
the loss,  
the theft and  
the resistance.  
May we be inspired by truth-tellers,  
Justice-seekers and peace-makers in every age.  
Turn our inaction into action.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ  
Amen.

*(Katherine Rainger, Common Grace)*

## VIDEO CLIP

Uluru Statement from the Heart, read by First Nations collaborators:

<https://youtu.be/rWolqPyQTK4>

## AND/OR

Quandamooka man, Uluru Statement leader and Yes Alliance Director, Dean Parkin's statement, to clergy, lay leaders and Christian advocates for the Voice

<https://youtu.be/rCjVJvOxDpl>

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Almighty and loving God, you, who created ALL people in your image, lead us to seek your compassion as we listen to the stories of our past.

**ALL: Lord hear our prayer.**

You gave your only Son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that sins will be forgiven. We place before you the pain and anguish of dispossession of land, language, lore, culture and family kinship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced. We live in faith that all people will rise from the depths of despair and hopelessness.

**ALL: Lord hear our prayer.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have endured the pain and loss of loved ones, through the separation of children from their families. We are sorry and ask God's forgiveness. Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and afflicted and heal their spirits. In your mercy and compassion walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

Lord, you are our hope.

**ALL: Amen.**

(National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission 2002, *Prayer for the Healing Journey*)

OFFERING in support of the work of Yes23: <https://yes23.com.au/donate>

## SONG SUGGESTIONS:

TIS #657 *God of freedom, God of justice* **OR**

TIS #689 *Lord, hear my praying, listen to me*

## BLESSING AND COMMISSION

May the God of all wonder who set the stars in the sky,  
bless you with relentless unsettledness –  
that drives you to seek truth.

May the God of all justice who gave motion to the rivers,  
bless you with righteous anger –  
that drives you to seek freedom for all.

May the God of all love who placed laughter in the kookaburra,  
bless you with the friendship –  
that looks like the love where one lays down their life for another.



May the God of all comfort who determined the height of the mountains,  
bless you with tears from shared pain and mourning –  
that shows you hope.

Now with wonder, righteous anger, sacrifice, and lament –  
Go in truth, justice, love, and hope –  
to Change The Heart of Australia.

(Brooke Prentis, Common Grace)