

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

# LITURGY OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND LAMENT

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
NATIONAL APOLOGY TO SURVIVORS OF  
INSTITUTIONAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



Uniting Church in Australia  
ASSEMBLY

# CONTENT WARNING

This liturgy is to mark the anniversary of the national apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. It acknowledges the experiences of survivors but is not intended to focus on personal stories.

It is possible that this liturgy could raise concerns for people, particularly for those where child sexual abuse has been part of their lives.

Pastoral care should be available during and after the liturgy.

Dealing with trauma from childhood sexual abuse requires specialised support.

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A list of services in each State and Territory can be accessed at:

<https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/support/explore>

24-hour telephone assistance is available through:

- BeyondBlue  
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>  
1300 224 636
- MensLine <https://mensline.org.au/>  
1300 789 978
- Lifeline <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>  
13 11 14

Specialised support for survivors of abuse is available through Blue Knot Foundation. from 9am-5pm AEDT Mon-Sun. 1300 657 380  
<https://www.blueknot.org.au/>

## ABOUT THIS LITURGY

This Liturgy marks the anniversary of the National Apology to Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. It is a resource that highlights the Church's commitments:

- to mark the anniversary and never forget,
- to reiterate the Church's apology to survivors and commitment to redress and reconciliation,
- to renew our commitment to live the Gospel of Christ through being a Church that embodies a culture and practice of safety,
- to share the work of the Church in the areas of redress and safety.

The Assembly offers this liturgy as a resource, with the understanding that ministers and other leaders in their local contexts, familiar with their own gathered and online communities, will use and adapt this liturgy as is suitable for their context. The Liturgy in its entirety, or parts of it, could be used:

- in Sunday worship (if appropriate)
- in a smaller online setting where people are meeting as part of a regular supportive gathering (e.g. a small group discipleship group, a study group)
- for another in-person context

We note that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, some congregations continue to meet in the online environment or with hybrid online and face-to-face elements, and that there may be attendance by people online who do not regularly attend in person worship. Providing safety and support in this context must be considered when addressing issues of child abuse and it is suggested that attentive, pastoral leadership is required in the online environment as well as any face to face gatherings.

Some information on pastoral support in the context of child sexual abuse will be presented at the end of this Liturgy, as well as resources to assist congregations and faith communities to enact the Principles for a Child Safe Uniting Church.

# THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE

*Song: Enemy of Apathy by John L. Bell (TiS 418)*

## **THE FOLDED FLOWERS**



*(At the beginning of the service some folded flowers in various colours are distributed to the congregation. Worship leader explains the symbolism of the flower: our past has been folded like this paper flower, and we hold them to our hearts. During the service, the congregation will place them into a large bowl of water. At the end of service, the congregation will come forward and collect them again. Please find the folded flower shapes on pages 14 and 15.)*

## **DEDICATION OF WATER**

*Worship leader explains the symbolism of water:*

Through the waters of baptism we remember that we are the beloved of God and are raised to newness of life with Christ.

## **LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE**

*Worship leader invites a family to light the Christ Candle.*

Christ said: "I am the light of the world".  
The light shines in the darkness;  
and the darkness has not overcome it.

## **THE LAND AND THE PEOPLES**

*(Responses are in the BOLD FONT)*

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.

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here.  
We honour those who have gone before  
and those who are yet to come.

We acknowledge the [                    ] people, *(insert the name of the First Peoples whose land we gather on)* traditional custodians of this land under God.

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 purpose of God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.**

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Today we mark the anniversary of the National Apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse.

To support all survivors,  
we will open our hearts and we will be still.

**We will not turn away.**

Let us pray:  
God of the vulnerable,

**God of the oppressed,**

God who gathers up the little child and  
shows them to the world as precious beyond words.

**Help us to be present to your Spirit.**

Help us to walk boldly into this house of grief.

**We come here today** to remember the folded past.

**We come here today** to remember the catastrophic history of sexual abuse of children.

**Today is a Day of Mourning.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Merciful God,  
**We, the community of faith,  
acknowledge and lament  
the violence and abuse**

**done to the survivors of childhood sexual abuse  
in the history of this nation.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Today is a Day of Lament.

**We remember the stories of brokenness  
and the terrible breach of trust.**

We lift the profound suffering to God,  
and we bring before you our prayers for all survivors.

**And we say sorry.**

And we say sorry.

**And we say sorry.**

We acknowledge and lament  
the way in which their innocence was ripped from them.

**We pray for their hidden memories and fear of the past.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

We acknowledge and lament

**the way in which the Christian church  
was so often not only complicit in abuse  
but also used cheap forgiveness  
to mask ongoing suffering.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Today we come and pray for restoration.  
We commit ourselves to truth telling.

**Give us courage, O Lord,  
to stay in the unbearable moments,  
to never forget the past,  
to shine your light in all that is hidden**

Today is a Day of Change.

**We acknowledge and lament  
in a time of crying out for justice,  
our communities have been indifferent  
when we should have been outraged,  
we have been silent when we should have spoken out.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Today we come and pray for healing.

We commit ourselves to building a culture of safety, making the Church safe for all people, creating a space where all can thrive.

God of mercy,  
**forgive us**  
for we have failed survivors in the past,  
**give us the grace to make a fresh start.**

By your Spirit, transform our compassion,  
**so that we may see what Christ sees**  
**hear what Christ hears**  
**love how Christ loves.**

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayers.**

Hear the promise of God's love to us all....  
May God forgive us and the Spirit enable  
us to grow in love.

### **PLACING OF THE FOLDED FLOWERS**

*(Contemplative music to be played...The congregation members bring forward the folded paper flowers and place them into the water. This is a symbol of coming together, bringing our grief, our pain and our concerns before God.)*

## **THE SERVICE OF THE WORD**

### **Psalm 121**

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?  
**My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

God will not let your foot be moved;  
God who keeps you will not slumber.

**God who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord is your keeper;  
The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade.

**The sun shall not strike you by day,**  
**nor the moon by night.**

The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.

**The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go,**  
**both now and forever.**

### **Luke 18:1-8 The Parable of the Persistent Widow**

These are the words of faith

**Thanks be to God.**

## **SERMON/REFLECTION**

### **Reflection notes:**

If the Church is not a safe place, it is not a place where the gracious love of God in Christ can call people into community in which all can share, grow and serve. It is not a place where all in the gathered community might hear the message of Christ. This is the challenge that faces Churches as a result of the findings of the Royal Commission.

It is easy to identify this issue as 'other' than us. "It couldn't/didn't happen here". When we make this issue someone else's, we open ourselves to complacency and we ignore the challenge for us all... that to bear witness to God's love in Jesus Christ is to create a community of welcome and safety, for all who may engage it.

This is the challenge the Church is invested in. For all those who have been harmed in the life of the Church, there must be appropriate processes of redress and apology, appropriate processes for restoration.

For all those who are in the community of faith, the witness that this community of faith is a community of safety.

And, as we seek to continue to bear witness to Christ, the challenge, for each one of us, is that being a community of safety is our responsibility... together.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Loving God, we know that you hold us in the palm of your hand.

**We know it is so.**

So why, O God, why?

**This sin against your small ones?**

Why this assault on body and on soul, this destruction of innocence?

**Why, O God, O why?**

We pray today for survivors of child sexual abuse, we pray for justice, for strength and healing.

**God open us to your courage.**

We pray for family and friends of child abuse survivors, and all who provide care and support.

**God open us to your love.**

We pray for those who have a family member or friend who

has died as a result of their abuse.

**God open us to your holy grief.**

We acknowledge with gratitude the work of the Royal Commission who enabled survivors to speak of their suffering, showed us our sin and called us to mend our ways.

**We give thanks.**

We acknowledge with gratitude, advocates who exposed the truth about institutional child abuse and who campaigned for truth-telling and justice.

**We give thanks.**

We acknowledge our need to change as a Church. Strengthen us to act with justice towards survivors, to listen to our children and to implement policies and practices which create safer communities.

**Reform us O God.**

We commit ourselves as your Church to being places of safety, free of abuse and exploitation.

We commit ourselves as your Church to be communities, where people can flourish in life-giving ways of trust and love.

**Reform us O God.**

Through Christ we pray, Amen.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**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 forever.  
Amen.**

**THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE**

**SHARING OF THE PEACE**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

## **COLLECTING THE FLOWERS**

*People are invited to come forward after the sharing of the peace and collect the flowers from the water. The folded paper flower should be opened due to water surface tension. A hidden message is revealed: "God cares for you". People take this symbol of restoration home and share the message with others.*

## **BENEDICTION**

May the love of God enfold us,  
the wisdom of Christ enlighten us,  
and the fire of the Spirit fill us with passion for the Gospel;  
and may the blessing of the holy triune God rest upon us and  
abide with us, now and evermore.

**Amen.**

***Song: For You, Deep Stillness - Robin Mann and Julie Perrin***



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that this worship service reflects the impact of childhood sexual abuse and the truth-telling courage of the survivors.

In the spirit of justice and reconciliation, the Uniting Church commits to our ongoing role in bearing witness to those who have suffered.

The observance of the anniversary of the National Apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse was endorsed by the Assembly Standing Committee.

This Liturgy was prepared by Assembly Resourcing Unit, National Safe Church Unit, UCA Redress Ltd and the Transforming Worship Circle for the Anniversary in 2020.

All Uniting Church congregations and faith communities are required to learn and enact the Principles for a Child Safe UCA. The National Safe Church Unit has developed resources to assist in this work.

They are available here: <https://safechurch.uca.org.au/resources/>

## **SAFE CHURCH CONTACTS**

### **NEW SOUTH WALES/AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

#### **Safe Church Unit**

Rev Bronwyn Murphy, Associate Secretary  
Ms Anne Empson, Manager Compliance  
Rev Tara Curlewis, Safe Church Relationships Minister

[safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au)

[nswact.uca.org.au/safe-church-unit/](http://nswact.uca.org.au/safe-church-unit/)

### **QUEENSLAND**

Lynde Davy, Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer

[safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au](mailto:safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au)

[ucaqld.com.au/synod-services/safety/safe-ministry-with-children/](http://ucaqld.com.au/synod-services/safety/safe-ministry-with-children/)

### **NORTHERN SYNOD**

[safechurch@ns.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@ns.uca.org.au)

[ns.uca.org.au](http://ns.uca.org.au)

### **VICTORIA/TASMANIA**

Sue Clarkson, Ethical Standards Manager  
Josh Tuhipa-Turner, Safe Church Coordinator

[cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

[ucavictas.org.au/keepingchildrensafe](http://ucavictas.org.au/keepingchildrensafe)

### **SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Philip Gardner, Executive Officer, Placements and Safe Church

[safechurch@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@sa.uca.org.au)

[sa.uca.org.au/safechurch/](http://sa.uca.org.au/safechurch/)

### **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Cindy Gorton, Executive Office Culture of Safety

[Cindy.gorton@wa.uca.org.au](mailto:Cindy.gorton@wa.uca.org.au)

[unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church/](http://unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church/)

## **ELEMENTS OF PASTORAL CARE FOR THIS SERVICE**

### **Preparing for the liturgy**

Church leaders may wish to meet beforehand to consider how to best provide pastoral care during and after the liturgy.

You may wish to reference the resources available on the Blue Knot Foundation website to facilitate these discussions.

### **During the liturgy**

The signs of trauma may be difficult to monitor online. You may wish to prepare the participants by ensuring people are aware that the liturgy will mark the anniversary of the apology to survivors of institutional childhood sexual abuse. You may wish to devise a system so that people can flag with you if they need your attention during the liturgy - perhaps a "raise hand" or "private message" by Zoom, and suggest people ensure they can access support at home if they need it and remind them of the emergency contact numbers above.

Signs of trauma that could be observed during the liturgy include:

- Withdrawal
- Crying
- Anger
- Leaving the Zoom

### **After the liturgy**

Possible follow up includes:

- Immediately contacting anyone who sought support or who showed signs of trauma during the liturgy. "Are you okay?" or "Do you want to talk about anything that was raised for you during the Liturgy?" are good starters; follow up with listening and supporting a person to access appropriate supports, referrals or to undertake reporting to authorities
- Sending a general message of support to all participants, inviting contact and reminding them of support services.
- Attend to your own self-care needs.

Confidential debriefing may be required after supporting someone as they work through a traumatic experience. For specialised support for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, please contact Blue Knot Foundation 1300 657 380.





