



A FIRST PEOPLES HEART



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OUR VISION:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, nurtured and sustained by God before invasion, are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. First Peoples' sovereignty is affirmed, First Peoples have a voice in the decision making of our country and are living out their right to self-determination.

As First and Second Peoples, we heal together, creating socially just and culturally safe relationships, listening and learning from one another.

OUR HOPES

- That Australia embraces the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full as the preferred pathway towards truth, healing and justice, including:
 - Hearing and understanding a First Peoples' voice in all matters impacting their lives.
 - Agreement-making or treaty-making between governments and First Peoples' communities.
 - Truth-telling about Australia's history, seeking justice and healing.
- Formal Truth-telling occurs, leading to communal acceptance of the ongoing impact of Colonisation, including the story of the Stolen Generations, and the ongoing impacts of trauma on First Peoples' families and communities.
- Self-determination at Federal, state and local levels is informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), giving First Peoples' communities full control over decisions impacting their lives, Country and cultural sites.
- That all Australians would respect, learn from, understand and celebrate First Peoples' cultural approach to living spiritually within a holistic world view.
- Community led, meaningful, effective, culturally-appropriate and research-based policies and programs to significantly reduce incarceration of First Peoples.
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age across all Australian jurisdictions.
- Significant and consistent resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community health and wellbeing services, designed to achieve a closing of the gap in health, mental health and social outcomes.
- Adequate resourcing of remote communities.
- High rates of early childhood education, school attendance and completion among First People students supported by sufficient professional resourcing and educational opportunities, no matter where a person lives.
- First People languages to be preserved, taught and incorporated into civic functions.
- True bilingual education to become a reality for First Peoples where English is not a first language.

- Support for First Peoples business and increased local employment opportunities in remote communities.
- Australia embraces allyship. All Second Peoples are allies to First Peoples and their communities, finding opportunities to amplify First Peoples' voices and actively seek truthful information in order to learn from First Peoples. Allies find ways to help without burdening First Peoples' own activists and leaders and are willing to have tough conversations themselves with their own friends and family to challenge discriminatory views.

THE STATE OF THE NATION

- October 2023 saw the failure of a referendum to create a Federal Voice to Parliament with 60 per cent of Australians voting against it. The impact of this is still being felt by communities across the country, with many now rallying for renewed allyship between First and Second Peoples.
- First Peoples have given us the Uluru Statement from the Heart, but we have failed to live up to its call for self-determination, truth and justice.
- Data continues to be collected and used against First Peoples' communities. It is used without their informed consent which takes away the power to tell their own stories in the face of the ongoing impacts of colonisation.
- First Peoples' communities, whether remote, regional or urban, experience heightened levels of disadvantage. First Peoples in Australia have a lower life expectancy and worse health, education and employment outcomes across the board than other people in Australia.
- 2 in 3 (67%) First Peoples aged 15 and over who experienced physical harm between 2017-2018 reported the perpetrator was an intimate partner or family member.
- Over 7 in 10 (72%) assault hospitalisations involving First Peoples were due to family violence.
- Proportionally, Australia's First Peoples are the most incarcerated people on the planet. First Peoples comprise over 30 per cent of the adult prison population¹. Even more distressingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth constitute 6.6% per cent of the total youth population in Australia but represent sixty percent of youth in detention aged 10 and over across the country².
- Stolen Generations survivors and their families continue to carry trauma and were over-represented as victims in the Royal Commission

into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017).

WITNESS FROM THE BIBLE

- We begin from the starting point that all humans are made in the image of God and are thus to be equally respected, included and supported in society (Genesis 1: 26-27).
- The New Testament Epistles describe a community without distinctions (Galatians 3: 28) and call Christians to the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5: 18) and of pursuing peace with everyone (Hebrews 12: 14).
- In John 10:10 Jesus spoke of his coming to bring abundant life for all.
- In Roman chapter 8 there is a vision that includes the whole of creation as being indistinguishable from humanity, which can help Christians understand how First Peoples see a holistic connection between the land and ourselves. All of creation also suffers alongside humanity because humanity itself has been the cause of great suffering in the natural world, which is God’s creation (Romans 18-21). Together, all of creation longs for redemption because it is interconnected (Romans 22-25). God has given us the strength to be active participants in our redemption by seeking reconciliation within creation, which means choosing to alleviate suffering within the material world by caring for God’s creation (Romans 26-27).

WHAT THE UCA AFFIRMS

The Uniting Church Covenant between First and Second Peoples (1994)³

At its 7th Assembly in 1994, the Uniting Church formally entered into a binding Covenant relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and its members, recognising and repenting for the Church’s complicity in the injustices perpetrated on Australia’s First Peoples, and pledging to move forward with a shared future. UAICC’s generous response to this statement, among other messages, called upon the broader Church to take up the mission of truth, justice and biblically informed reconciliation.

The Uniting Church Covenant between First and Second Peoples is informed by:

Preamble to the UCA Constitution (2009)⁴

The 12th Assembly affirmed a new preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution which recognises the unjust and brutal history of dispossession against the First Peoples, together with how the Church was complicit in this. Importantly, it recognises that God was in this land from the very beginning, in creation, and this Creator God was known by First Peoples long before the colonisers arrived. The Word was in Creation and is revealed in human form as Jesus Christ.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017)^{5,6}

In August 2017, responding to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the National Executive of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) affirmed the work that supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart, in which First Peoples’ leaders asked for a voice to advise Parliament, and the creation of a commission to oversee Makarrata or treaty making.

Uniting for the Voice (2023)⁷

In March 2023, the Assembly Standing Committee resolved to “declare the support of the Uniting Church in Australia for the proposed change in the Australian Constitution to recognise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, as a step toward the invitation of the Uluru Statement to voice, truth telling, and treaty; and noting the significance of this moment in our nation’s history and relationship with its First Peoples, to call on church, community and political leaders to engage the referendum issues, modelling respectful and constructive dialogue”.

Recognising First Peoples as Sovereign, the 15th Assembly (2018)⁸

The Assembly resolved “to affirm the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in this land”. In recognising this fundamental truth, the UCA offered moral leadership to the nation. The UCA affirms sovereignty as it is described in the Uluru Statement from the Heart as ‘a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land’, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be untied with our ancestors. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.”

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2024)^{9,10}

The Uniting Church Assembly resolved to endorse the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and to implement its principles, including self-determination, throughout the Uniting

Church's policies, procedures and practices. It further encouraged other councils and parts of the Church to endorse UNDRIP and implement it.

6. What are you doing, or what might you do to further justice for First Peoples in your own community?

OUR ASKS:

1. Recognise the Uluru Statement from the Heart as a living document, and seek to embody Voice, Treaty and Truth at Federal and State levels.
2. Establish community led bodies for treaty making at Federal and State levels.
3. Establish community led bodies for truth-telling across all jurisdictions.
4. Provide sufficient funding to achieve the Closing the Gap targets, prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations to deliver services wherever possible.
5. Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age across all jurisdictions.
6. That all Governments redouble their efforts to address Target 13 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is to reduce the rate of all forms of family violence against First Nations women and children by at least 50% by 2031.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

You might like to put one or two of these questions to MP's and local leaders:

1. Does your party or organisation have a Reconciliation Action Plan, and what are the key points?
2. Have you read the Uluru Statement from the Heart? How do you feel about Treaty or Treaties with First Peoples, and truth-telling Across Australia?
3. What is your position regarding understanding First Peoples as sovereign in this land, and the implications of that?
4. What do you think should be done to address First Peoples' disadvantage in terms of life expectancy, health and education?
5. What do you think should be done to address First Peoples incarceration rates in Australia? What is your position on raising the age of criminal responsibility across all jurisdictions to 14 years?

References:

1. <https://theconversation.com/first-nations-impersonment-is-already-at-a-record-high-unless-government-policy-changes-it-will-only-get-worse-226612>
2. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2024/contents/summary/first-nations-young-people-in-detention>
3. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/310>
4. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/128>
5. <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>
6. Minutes of the National Congress Executive held Tuesday 15 August 2017
7. ASC Resolution 23.22.02 Uniting for the Voice
8. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/647>
9. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf
10. 17th Assembly: <https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/C-Prop-11-Uniting-Aboriginal-and-Islander-Christian-Congress-Proposals-1.pdf>