

Message for the 49th Uniting Church Anniversary – 22 June 2026

President Rev Charissa Suli

TRANSCRIPT:

Beloved friends in Christ, grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus

Today we celebrate 49 years of the Uniting Church in Australia, and we give thanks for the faith, courage and vision of those who in 1977 came together to follow Christ and live out the gospel in this land.

When you installed me as your President, I shared with you a fala – a Tongan mat – that my sister-in-law had woven from threads she carried with her from Tonga.

She left it unfinished, and she did so on purpose: an unfinished mat for the beginning of this triennium, with more still to be woven. And what she taught me has stayed with me: a fala is never made in a day. It is woven slowly, across many seasons, and a mat still on the loom is not a lack, but a promise that there is more love still to weave.

And that is who we are. Across cities and towns, congregations, agencies, schools and cultures, we are being woven together – not because we are all the same, but because the love of Christ runs through every thread.

And so, I acknowledge the First Peoples of this land and pay my respects to Elders past and present, giving thanks for the covenant we have shared with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress for more than 30 years.

I know that for many of you this has been a tiring season. Congregations are navigating change, leaders are carrying heavy loads and weaving, as any weaver knows, is costly – at times a thread must be cut or untangled before the mat can hold. But these are not signs of failure.

They are invitations: to draw closer to Christ, to lean again on one another, and to rediscover the prayer, worship and service that have always sustained us.

For we have never been held together by sameness, but by the love of Christ. Across our diversity, Christ is present. Across our differences, Christ is present.

Across our grief and our hope, our questions and our joy, Christ is still present. For on the cross he tore down the walls that divide us and became our peace.

This is why, over these past 30 days, from Pentecost to this anniversary, we have gathered as one Church in prayer, asking the Spirit to renew us.

And the Spirit is indeed calling us back to depth, back to prayer, and back to a people shaped not by fear or scarcity, but by trust in the abundance of God.

As we celebrate 49 years, we look toward our 50th. In Scripture, the 50th year carries a holy name – Jubilee – the year of release, of return, of all things being made whole. It was the word Jesus took upon his lips in Nazareth when he proclaimed good news to the poor and freedom to the captive. So may our coming year be a true Jubilee: a year to weave Christ's love more boldly across every boundary that still divides us.

For this is the work to which God now calls us – to tell the story of where Christ's love has crossed the boundary among us; to bridge the differences that keep us apart and listen deeply until we understand; and to allow the Spirit to search our own hearts, and to find the courage to heal the wounds among us, naming honestly the racism and division that can take root even in our Church.

And so, beloved Church, let us embrace this moment with courage and hope. Not because the road ahead is easy, but because Christ walks with us. Not because we have all the answers, but because the Spirit continues to guide us. Not because we are without weakness, but because the grace of God is always sufficient.

The threads of God's love are still being woven through our life together – in every act of kindness, every prayer offered, every table set wide enough to welcome a stranger.

That fala, woven for this triennium, is still unfinished – as it was always meant to be; for no mat is ever completed by one pair of hands.

We each weave our part, and then we hand it on – to those who come after us, who will take up the threads and add their own.

For we are, as our Basis of Union reminds us, a pilgrim people, still on the way towards the promise of God.

May God weave us together in love. May the risen Christ renew and reconcile us. And may the Holy Spirit give us courage for the journey ahead.

Happy 49th anniversary, Uniting Church.

Ofa lahi atu.