



THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DIALOGUE OF  
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC AND UNITING CHURCHES

# CRYING OUT

Exploring the *Statement from the Heart*  
and care for the environment

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, the Kurna people and Aboriginal peoples of South Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.*

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry  
Creator: South Australian Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches  
Title: Crying Out: Exploring the Statement from the Heart and care for the environment

ISBN: 978-0-646-82502-1 (paperback)  
Subjects: Religion, Social Sciences

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(paperback)

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## Introduction to Group

Formed in 1990, the South Australian Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches (RCUC) is based in Adelaide, South Australia and continues to be a rich example of ecumenism through study, reflection, prayer, communication, responding and listening.

The dialogue group is made up of representatives of various aspects of both churches, including ministry, community, youth, rural communities and education. The RCUC is currently the only active formal dialogue group between the Catholic and Uniting Churches in Australia.

The group engages in ongoing discussions which seek to gain a deeper appreciation of each other's traditions and draw on them to find ways of connection. This is achieved through dialogue, sharing of experience and joint efforts for Christian unity.

## Introduction to Resource

Out of this dialogue grew a need to develop a resource that could be used across traditions, addressing poignant topics for our time and people. The focus and aim of this resource is to consider the interconnectedness of climate change and first peoples taking in current contexts, realities and respective traditions.

This study will contribute to preparing church communities to come to the discussion about treaty and climate change. It hopes to increase understanding of how the churches have participated in history and how our tools of faith can support and equip us into the future.

This study is ideal for group settings where the opportunity to dialogue is encouraged. Each section includes questions for reflection and an invitation to prayer.

To explore more fully the details of this resource please refer to the *Leader Guide* available at [sdialoguercuc.org](http://sdialoguercuc.org)

## section one

# In the Wilderness

The landscape of our lives, our society, our country, our world is changing dramatically. We are living in challenging, uncertain times in this 'Lucky Country'.

We see the distress and hear the cries that rise up from the people:

- First Peoples crying out to be heard, respected and honoured;
- Refugees and asylum seekers desperately yearning for a safe home;
- Homeless, unemployed and the impoverished seeking wholeness and security;
- Abused women and children, longing for safety and shelter;
- Young people desiring to make sense of life in a world of injustice, violence, and exploitation.

We see the distress and hear the cries rise up from the earth:

- Farmers struggling with long term drought, exacerbated by climate change;
- Those suffering from the pervasive effects of the pandemic, illness and disease, yearning for health and navigating loss;
- Victims of horrific bushfires losing family, friends, property, and livelihoods;
- The clearing of lands that are rich with the food for animals;
- Our living soil is dying from excessive use of chemicals;
- Our fertile fields are lifeless, becoming desert.

The earth and her people are crying out for healing and renewal for the whole of creation.

## We Are Wandering

We are in a wilderness, unsure which way to go. We are as bereft as the Israelites wandering those forty years.

*Our voices cry—where is hope?*

*How shall we live? Who can we trust? Where is God?*

*Our earth is crying out.*

*We are longing for love, for justice in the world, for the common good of all people and for the common good of all creation.*

*We are longing to have hope.*

*We are longing to hear the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing across our wilderness.*

The Israelites in their wandering found surprising food and sustenance in the wilderness. The presence of God was made real to them. They were not alone. We are not alone.

# Reflect

1. What do you cry out for in our wilderness?
2. What sustenance, strength and resilience are we already discovering in our wilderness?
3. What hope do we carry with us knowing that God is with us? We are not alone.

# Pray

Gracious God,  
in whom we live and move and have our being,  
though we are anchored in you,  
our hearts are often unsteady and insecure.

When we allow fear to rule the day,  
mistrust, chaos, competition and selfish clinging  
take hold of our community,  
and we lose sight of your gracious love.

Trusting in your forgiveness,  
May we lay aside every fear  
and hold fast to the way of love –  
consciously, consistently, communally,  
for the sake of Christ.  
Amen.

## A Sign of Hope: The Uluru Statement

On 26 May 2017, the voice of 250 First Peoples of Australia proclaimed *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*. They came “from all points of the southern sky” as delegates to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Referendum Convention, held near Uluru in Central Australia.

The statement calls for a “First Nations Voice” in the Australian Constitution and a “Makarrata Commission” to supervise a process of “agreement-making” and “truth-telling” between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The statement comes 50 years after the 1967 referendum which brought about changes to the Constitution of Australia to include Indigenous Australians in the national census.

This proclamation is still to be heard, listened to, dialogued with, and received as a gift by the whole Australian community.

*You are invited to read the full Uluru Statement on page 10 - 11.*

Christians in Australia must address the fact that at least some of the justification for settlement and displacement of First Peoples was due to Christian theology and doctrine. This was most clearly expressed in the *Doctrine of Discovery (1493)*, which legitimised the colonisation of lands discovered beyond Europe. This was at the expense of the First Peoples whose sovereignty has been overridden and ignored.

### Receiving the Gift: A Christian Reflection

While aspects of the Christian tradition have been used to perpetrate great injustice over the centuries, the heart of our Christian faith is a God who sides with the poor and those suffering injustice. Following the 2019 Synod of Bishops of the Amazon region, Pope Francis in his 2020 post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (Portuguese/Spanish for “Dear Amazon”) reflects on the injustice suffered by the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. His words of human and Christian outrage are easily transposed to our Australian context for the injustice suffered by the First Peoples of Australia:

*“We need to feel outrage, as Moses did (Ex 11:8), as Jesus did (Mk 3:5), as God does in the face of injustice (Am 2:4-8; 5:7-12; Ps 106:40). It is not good for us to become inured to evil; it is not good when our social consciousness is dulled before ‘an exploitation that is leaving destruction and even death throughout our region... jeopardizing the lives of millions of people and especially the habitat of peasants and indigenous peoples’. The incidents of injustice and cruelty that took place in the Amazon region even in the last century ought to provoke profound abhorrence, but they should also make us more sensitive to the need to acknowledge current forms of human exploitation, abuse and killing” (n.15).*

The Uniting Church’s founding document, the *Basis of Union* (1977) summarises the mission of God and the church’s relationship with it.

*“God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself” (n. 3).*

This reminds us that being agents of reconciliation is central to who we are as the church. We recognise the task of reconciliation extends to all in the Australian community regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds.

The great commandment, to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12: 31), calls all Christians to join in this work of reconciliation. *The Statement from the Heart* is a vital step in the journey towards recognising the sovereignty of First Nations people.

*The Statement from the Heart* is thus a very key call from the First Peoples of Australia to the nation. As Christians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we need to pay attention and recognise our calling to do as our Indigenous brothers and sisters request;

- to accept their invitation to walk with them into a future that names and recognises the injustices done;
- to honestly own our shared history, and work towards a new future where the current structures and policies that disempower are reformed;
- to work to ensure that renewal as a nation is possible.

That is our hope.

# The Uluru Statement from the Heart

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is 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 united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

## The Uluru Statement from the Heart

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

## Reflect

1. What challenge or inspiration do we hear in the Statement as an Australian and as a Christian?
2. What would help us receive the gift being offered in the Statement?

## Pray

Holy and Ancient One,  
In your image and likeness, you created all people,  
You made humans “a little lower than the angels”  
Yet we are often blinded to the dignity and sacredness of every person  
Especially the First Peoples of Australia.

To them you entrusted care for the land  
And inspired them with the Dreamtime.  
May we learn what it means to be stewards  
Of the land, and of our stories.

Give us courage to act with honesty, compassion and hope  
To make space for all voices to be heard,  
Humility to learn wisdom,  
And seek true reconciliation.

We pray in your name, O God,  
Amen.

## Reading

**For further background reading on this section we suggest;**

Discovering Indigenous Lands (2010)

*J. Miller, Jacinta Ruru, Larissa Behrendt, and Tracey Lindberg*

Why Indigenous Sovereignty Should Matter to Christians (2018)

*Chris Budden*

# A Response in Faith

The Roman Catholic and Uniting Church traditions offer complementary perspectives on how we can engage in care for the environment and our relationship with First Peoples.

## *What is the Christian responsibility for the environment?*

### **A Roman Catholic Response**

Christians are invited in the spirit of the Gospel and wisdom of our respective traditions to meditate upon the natural world, to take steps to care for it and to speak out against acts of violence in our world perpetrated against creation. The Creation stories (Genesis 1 & 2) remind us that we are stewards of God's creation. God has entrusted the world to us. Human life is also a gift from God. Caring for our world requires changes in lifestyles and ways of thinking and acting that show concern for all of creation.

Pope Francis calls for a new dialogue about how we are shaping our planet. This will deepen our sense of our common and mutual origin, and the need to care for creation. He sees a close link and an interdependence to all things in our environment. Individuals, communities and governments need to work together towards a new way of living and a new lifestyle.

### **A Uniting Church Response**

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment arises out of the belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with creation of mutuality and interdependence – seeking the reconciliation of all creation with God. God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not the destruction of the earth, our environment, or all creatures.

The Christian community is called to be a sign of the coming of God's reign by living as faithful disciples of Jesus. We are to thus work for the continued existence of all creatures and plant life. Nature is not to be plundered or abused. The abundance of the earth's resources, food and water, must be managed in a just, participatory and sustainable manner, for the benefit of current and future generations.

## *Where do we experience a spirit of environmental care and conversion?*

### **A Roman Catholic Response**

This experience occurs in the First instance when we see and participate with others in their concern for the poor. This concern for the poor is not only expressed in care for people who live and experience poverty and rejection—including the first Australians. It is also the poverty we see in environmental degradation and the abuse of earth's gifts. Mediating upon the natural world and spending time with it.

### **A Uniting Church Response**

We experience this spirit when human flourishing and abundant life for all creation is our goal. Likewise, when the earth's resources are managed in a just, sustainable manner; when human and financial resources are directed away from militarism to building peace practices; when the elimination of poverty is a priority and not the continued growth of the already wealthy; and when education is no longer relegated to the functional approaches of productivity, but is used to seek what our place in the world might be.

## *How is the call to care for the Earth related to care for one another?*

### **A Roman Catholic Response**

The practice of caring for human beings in all the contexts in which we discover the call to this that emerge from our anthropological convictions deepened through our call to discipleship reflects our care for Creation. Humans are integral to the Earth; they are intimately linked to Creation. Care for one naturally affects care for the other.

### **A Uniting Church Response**

The Uniting Church believes that the earth and the life it supports are precious. Earth's resources exist for the common good now, and for future generations. A doctrine of human domination of nature, accepting practices that fail to safeguard the integrity of creation (individualism, competition and greed), deny human flourishing. Human beings are created in the image of God, the very nature of God being community. The fullness of our humanity is in relationships with each other and with all creation. As a result, the Uniting Church is committed to promoting life-style practices marked by regard for the common good.

## ***How can we develop a richer understanding of the cultural and historical giftedness of Australia's First Peoples?***

### **A Roman Catholic Response**

The first step is education and exposure. The invitation to 'learn' from the culture, history and customs of the First Peoples is central. This can happen by fostering moments of 'conversation' in regional locations sponsored by our churches.

We can learn from the First Peoples about how to care for our common home. They have done it successfully for thousands of years. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there...When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. (*Laudato Si*, 186)

### **A Uniting Church Response**

Arising from our concern for the welfare of the whole human race, the Uniting Church stands in covenant relationship with the First Nations of this land. This partnership commits the Church to understanding the way Aboriginal peoples regard the land. Our journey begins with the recognition that prior to the landing in Botany Bay, God was in this land, and God's Spirit was integral to the way First People's related to this land. Cultural heritage (sites, language, concepts, customs) is an expression of the wholeness of humanity and offers new understandings to the critical task of conserving our future heritage.



## ***How can we encourage a spirit and practice of ecological conversion with regard to the environment and its peoples?***

### **A Roman Catholic Response**

Prayer resources that focus attention on the Earth, liturgical rituals that are seasonally appropriate, biblical studies that highlight God's care of the Earth and Gospel reflections that illustrate ecological ministry of Jesus— all these might help deepen an ecological spirituality.

We can encourage practices that benefit our environment. We can take part in special days and events such as Clean Up Australia Day, Earth Hour, World Environment Day and Season of Creation.

In partnership with our actions, we can pray for God's help in this work and that people recognize the need to look after our environment, our common home. We can use Prayer for our Earth from *Laudato Si*, the Ecological Examen or seasonal prayers such as the National Prayer Campaign for Drought. We can promote practices such as Reduce, Re-use and Recycle, minimising waste and reducing greenhouse emissions and conduct ecological audits in our communities.

These questions invite us to reflect deeply on the call to love our neighbour and our role as stewards of God's creation. Our response stems from our identity as a pilgrim people always on the way to, and participating in, God's promised Reign.

We invite you to personally respond to the reflection questions which address us as individuals and as community.

### **A Uniting Church Response**

God is the source of all we have. A critical element in our care of the environment is development of community. As individuals, and as Church, we need to develop practices of self-examination and awareness of our motivations and patterns of living, material and financial interests, in relation to our spiritual and ecological well-being, as we listen to what the Spirit is saying to us.

We need community for our well-being, for human flourishing, wholeness, generosity and hospitality. Building safe and inclusive communities, caring for each other, offer opportunities for learning from each other. Engaging in dialogue, learning from expertise about environmental action, planning our contributions to the health of our earth and its peoples, focussing on promoting human wholeness, equity and ecological sustainability, will all encourage a spirit of ecological conversion in relation to the environment and all peoples.

# Reflect

1. As you explored the Roman Catholic and Uniting Church responses, was there anything that surprised, challenged or encouraged you?
2. How might you personally answer any of the five questions in this section?

# Pray

We are woven in the webs of God's love binding all things in sacred kinship.

There is no portion of the planet, no living creature, no ecosystem or back yard garden that is expendable or meaningless.

There is no person, village, race, or nation at our greedy disposal.

God is with us and in us all and we are one.

*Lee Levett-Olson*

# Reading

For further background reading on this section we suggest;

## **Roman Catholic Resources**

Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si* "On Care for our Common Home."

Pope Francis' post-synodal Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, "The Beloved Amazon"

## **Uniting Church Resources**

*An Economy of Life*, 2006

*For the Sake of the Planet and its people*, 2006.

## section four

# Faith in Action

Our call to action can be summarised quite simply, in words attributed to St Francis of Assisi 'Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words'. As St Francis had a deep commitment to both the proclamation and embodiment of the Gospel, we too, are called to action in a similar way.

Our faith provides us with an opportunity to be challenged personally, and to invite others to journey with us. Faith is not words alone, but lived out in all we say and do. Our aim is a faith that is layered in prayer, in listening and in community, leading us on a continuing journey, inspiring action and embodying the Gospel.

## A life of justice

*As Christians, we seek to live a life of justice that is grounded in Christ. We can do this through;*

- Building our capacity to name and call out racism;
- Seeking to be in relationship with first peoples, earth and local environment;
- Seeking actions to be reconciling, healing and seeking new ways of being in community.



## Getting started

Effective action not only requires understanding and connection to social issues, but it needs direction and hope in the face of adversity. Several methods have been developed over the years which assist people of faith to engage in social analysis and reflection.

These methods allow action to be sustained and effective in the short and long term. Joseph Cardijn's See, Judge, Act methodology became the foundation for modern faith in action groups such as Young Christian Workers and Young Christian Students. An updated version of the Cardijn method called The Pastoral Circle, can be a helpful way to discern what issues you or your group should address, and how to go about addressing them. The Pastoral Circle has four steps:

### SEE

1. Insertion (identification of our personal experience with a social issue in our family, community or world).

### JUDGE

2. Social Analysis (a deeper look at the underlying causes and effects of the social issue)

3. Theological Reflection (engagement of the social issue through the lens of faith, Scripture, teachings, and Christian tradition)

### ACT

4. Action (Direct service, advocacy, community organising, etc.)

The fruit of action with a social issue is new experience – a new 'insertion' which leads to new analysis and reflection, leading to a new action, and deepening faith.

For a concise guide of The Pastoral Circle, including questions for each step, visit [lifelongfaith.com](http://lifelongfaith.com)

# Faith in Action

## Other ways to get started

- Learn about the First Peoples in your local area. You might do this by visiting public libraries, wider local reconciliation groups or church offices.
- From this, seek to form connections with First Peoples in your local area.
- To help develop a spirit of reconciliation visit [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)
- Invitation to be conscious of the things you consume and how you do it.  
Do you buy your fruit and veg locally? Do you walk or drive to do this? Do you remember to take your bags with you? How are you managing recycling?
- Explore environmental initiatives or groups in your local community. This can be done via [www.acf.org.au](http://www.acf.org.au) or talking to your leaders in your Church Community.

***“The Earth is  
what we all have  
in common.”***

*Wendell Berry*



# Reflect

1. What first steps do I want to take?
2. What first steps do we want our church community to take?

# Pray

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.  
Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.  
O Master, let me not seek as much  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in self-forgetting that we find,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
it is in dying that we are raised to eternal life.

*St Francis of Assisi (1881 – 1226)*



