

ECUMENICAL SERVICE

Friday 21 June 2024

Messages of hope 
in a complex world.



(responses are in bold italics)

GATHERING AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Call to Worship

Our land is alive with the glory of God;
desert sands hum and gum trees dance.

Brown grasses sing
and mountains breathe their stillness.

All created things add their rhythms of delight
and even stones rap out their praise.

Let our voices mingle with those of the earth;
may our hearts join the beat of her joy,

for our triune God is with us:

the Source of all being surrounds and upholds us.

Christ Jesus walks beside and before us.

The Spirit moves within and between us.

Blessed be God, our wonder and delight.

(From UCA/UAICC Day of Mourning Worship Service, 21 January 2024)

Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement

(Uncle Allen Edwards welcomed us to Country at Pilgrim Uniting Church, Adelaide)

The Land and the Peoples

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 Kurna people,* the 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.***

(From UCA Liturgy of Acknowledgement and Lament, 2023)

*Adapted for Adelaide, SA

Welcome**Greeting**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. *(2 Cor. 13:13)*

And also with you.

Let us share signs of the peace of Christ with one another.

Introduction to the service

(Please stand)

HYMN***THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION*****WORDS OF LAMENT**

Before we begin our prayer today, please be aware that some of the content included, may be emotionally difficult for many people.

We will acknowledge those who have suffered the pain of abuse and dispossession. We acknowledge the lifelong trauma of created by the failures of the churches in Australia to protect, believe and respond justly to Australia's First Peoples and those abused through the life of the churches and the consequent breach of community trust. We acknowledge those left out, those left by the side and those who have felt not welcomed.

Leader:

We have come here today from many places,
From east and west, north and south,
From pain and disillusionment,
From anger and confusion,
From sadness looking for hope.
We come together to listen,
To raise our hearts and voices to God,
In the hope that the very act of raising them in lament yet in faith,
They may be touched in their brokenness
And know the transforming and surpassing power of God's love.

Leader:

We gather in the name of The Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.
Merciful God, we acknowledge and lament the horrors of violence and cruelty inflicted on all those who suffered abuse at the hands of the people of the churches. We come before you begging for your mercy.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We lament the crimes and sins of sexual, physical, emotional and spiritual abuse perpetrated by clergy and lay against children, young people and vulnerable adults.

We lament the failure of all who refused to respond to the cries of the abused, our arrogant and suspicious attitudes towards them, our inability to admit our wrongdoing.

We lament our betrayal of trust and 'power over' victims; and the sadness and distress of loved ones of victims who have been left to grieve with unanswered questions.

We say 'sorry' with our whole hearts

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned

We lament the many lives tragically cut short by the indescribable pain of childhood abuse, and the deep pain of those who have been unable to share the story.

We say 'sorry' with all our hearts.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Leader:

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:

You gave your only Son
to save us by the blood of his cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering

the pain of all who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed
the trust placed in them.

Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters
who have been gravely harmed,
and the cries of those who love them.

Console their restless hearts with hope,
steady their shaken spirits with faith.

Forgive us for the times when as churches we have failed to accompany our sisters
and brothers through their pain of harm.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform brokenness into wholeness.

Grant us the courage and wisdom,
humility and grace, to act with justice.

Breathe wisdom into our prayers and labours.

Amen.

(Adapted from Ritual of Lament at the Plenary Council of Catholic Church in Australia, Monday 4 July 2022)

Leader:

Merciful God, we, the Second Peoples of this land, lament the injustice and abuse that has so often marked the treatment of the First Peoples of this land.

We lament the way in which their land was taken from them and their language, culture, law and spirituality despised and suppressed. We acknowledge and lament the way in which the Christian church was so often not only complicit in this process but actively involved in it.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We lament that in our own time, the injustice and abuse has continued.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We lament that the invitation to a new journey with the First Peoples of this land offered through the Uluru Statement from the Heart has not been received and the aspirations of a new journey of warmth, respect and justice has not been taken.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We lament the result of the referendum and the implication that the First Peoples of this land are not valued and respected. We grieve how this decision has been heard and seek justice and healing.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We have been indifferent. Gracious God, hear our confession — We have not loved you with our whole heart, nor have we loved First Peoples and other neighbours as ourselves.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

We lament our slowness in responding to the voices calling the Church to take up with intent its mission of hope, proclamation and good news so that the reality of God's kingdom can be seen and celebrated. We long to see our church communities energized by the presence of people, old and young, refugee and migrant, First Peoples and later arrivals gathering together to celebrate your goodness and love seen in Jesus Christ.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

God of mercy, forgive us for our failures, past and present and give us the grace today to make a fresh start. By your Spirit transform our minds and hearts so that we may love as you have loved us, that we may boldly speak your truth and courageously do your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Adapted from UCA/UAICC Day of Mourning Worship Service, 21 January 2024)

(Please remain seated for the following hymn)

HYMN

PELAS DORES DESTE MUNDO (For the Troubles and Sufferings of the World) - Sung by the Choir

(Words and Music: Rodolfo Gaede Neto, Brazil)

(Please stand)

Prayer of Confession and Affirmation

We live in a broken and hurting world, Compassionate God.

Come and restore us, Reconciling God.

Greed, hate, power, jealousy, pride and anger are only a few of the behaviours that separate us from each other.

Come and renew us, Loving God.

We nurse old wounds, we refuse to consider a different point of view, we are afraid of those we don't know, we act as if we have the best and only way.

Come and heal us, Merciful God.

We succumb to the idea that things will never change, that situations are hopeless, that conflicts will never cease, that relationships will remain broken.

But the good news is that God has the last word in our brokenness and that word is Jesus.

So, come, Lord Jesus, with your saving love and grace. Come to save us from our sin. Come to save us from ourselves. Come Lord Jesus to restore and mend broken lives, broken families, broken communities, and broken churches.

Amen.

Words of Assurance

The good news is this – Jesus came into the world to save us – to save us from our divisions, our greed, our selfishness, our hatred, our sins. This day we are saved to live our life in a new way – a life that reflects the restorative love of Jesus.

Amen.

(From Synod of the Trinity <https://www.syntrinity.org/> Presbyterian Church USA - <https://www.syntrinity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/closing-liturgy.pdf>)

(Please be seated)

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Old Testament Reading 2 Kings 2:1, then 6c to 15a

The NCCA Mantle

(The symbolism of the NCCA Mantle)

The mantle that is part of the service tonight was used in the Service of Inauguration of the National Council of Churches in Australia in St Christopher's Catholic Cathedral in Canberra on 3 July 1994.

The idea for this mantle came from 2 Kings. It represents the spirit of Elijah and symbolised the old council being reformed into the new, more inclusive council.

The Australian Christian Women designers saw that the cross of Christ is our centre and the basis of our unity, from which the Spirit goes into the world, flowing as the river of life.

There is more information about the design and making of the mantle on the NCCA website.

(The Mantle is brought in)

(As the mantle is moved through the congregation, as was done at the Service of Inauguration, we will sing the Taizé chant 'Vene Sancte Spiritus'.)

TAIZÉ CHANT

VENI SANCTE SPIRITUS

(Music: Jacques Berthier, Taizé Communauté)

(Please remain standing for the Gospel)

Gospel Reading John 17: 20-26

This is the word of God

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

(Please be seated)

Sermon

Rev John Gilmore

President National Council of Churches in Australia

DECLARATION OF INTENT

Led by NCCA President, Rev John Gilmore – Leaders invited forward.

(Church Leaders stand – say as one)

***As member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia,
We RE-AFFIRM our commitment to one another as partners on the ecumenical
journey;***

We BELIEVE that we are being blessed in our generation to witness the action of the Spirit in drawing the Churches in a common search for a fuller expression of unity;

We REJOICE in all we have in common and GIVE THANKS for the richness of our diversity, through recognising that our disunity is a hindrance to the Church's mission;

We RECOGNISE ONE ANOTHER as Communities of Faith, Hope and Love, committed to following Christ and pledged to serve God's kingdom;

We therefore MAKE A COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER to engage in an ongoing process of growing together (covenanting), not knowing what visible form unity, which is God's will and gift, may take, but believing that, by taking the steps to which we now commit ourselves, we shall be led to grow ever more deeply into that unity.

(from Australian Churches Covenanting Together document 2004)

(Please stand)

NCCA PRAYER

ALL:

***God of life, unity and peace,
you have called us to be your people.***

Bring us to closer unity with you within the household of your Church.

Direct our steps as we journey

in the National Council of Churches in Australia,

that we may become what you have called us to be;

and that together we may walk in newness of life:

new and old,

east and west,

indigenous and all who have gathered in this land from the corners of the earth.

We ask this in the name of Jesus

And through the grace and communion of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(from the NCCA Inauguration Service, 2 July 1994)

(Remain standing)

NICENE CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

(2025 will mark the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed)

ALL: (Led by Bishop Bartholomew, Greek Orthodox Church)

*We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light, from Light,
true God from true God;
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.*

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;

*he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.*

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered and was buried.

The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory

to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,

the Lord and giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father

and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

He spoke through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,

and to life in the world to come.

Amen

*(from A Service of Celebration, 70th Anniversary of the WCC,
St Pierre Cathedral, Geneva, Switzerland, 17 June 2018)*

(Please be seated)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray for the Christian Churches throughout the world.

May their proclamation of Jesus Christ renew the hearts of believers and be a word of hope to those who do not believe.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those lands where there is war, violence, and starvation.

May the leaders of those lands be freed of bitterness and hatred, and may they have the courage to seek peace.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for this fragile planet.

May people hear the cry of the earth and take action to bring restoration where there is degradation.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the First Nations peoples of this land.

May their voice, which speaks of the wisdom of their ancient cultures, be respected and heard.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for civic leaders.

May they be attentive to the needs of the weakest, and may their actions contribute to building vibrant communities.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for those who are hostile to religion and to Christian faith.

May Christian churches help them to engage in a dialogue that will benefit all.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the Christian churches whose witness is weakened by their division.

May we recognise what unites us and have the courage to continue on the way to Christian unity.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer.

(From the Worship Service, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2024)

Let us pray for the meetings of the Forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia, that we all may be sensitive to the prompting of God's Spirit in our

meeting. May our considerations shape the work of the NCCA as we seek greater Christian unity and fellowship.

Let us pray in the words our Lord taught us in the language of our heart

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 for ever.***

Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus, who prayed that all might be one,
we pray to you for the unity of all Christians,
according to your will, according to your means.

May your Spirit enable us to experience the suffering caused by division,
to see our sin and to hope beyond all hope.

Amen

(From the Worship Service, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2024)

Blessing

(Please Stand)

Grace, mercy and peace be with you, from the One who is and who was and who is to come.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen

Go now clothed in garments of praise to celebrate and proclaim Christ's love for all people.

CLOSING HYMN

WE ARE MARCHING IN THE LIGHT OF GOD

(Words and Music: South African traditional)
