



Social Justice Sunday 2001
Uniting Church in Australia



A Future for all



Introduction

Welcome to the Social Justice Sunday resources for 2001. We hope you have found the year to be an interesting time to reflect on our nation and the kind of society we are.

Christians from a variety of perspectives were involved in discussions prior to Federation. This document provides resources for reflecting as a church on the life of our nation a century after Federation. Developing the Australian constitution and negotiating federation of the states was a very white, male, elitist affair. Although Australia took some bold steps at Federation, such as allowing women to vote, Federation was also an expression of racism and self-interest. It was not until 1943 that there were women members of the national Parliament. In 2001, there is only one Aboriginal member of Parliament. We have ended the white Australia policy, but issues about refugees and asylum seekers still reflect racist assumptions and attitudes.

The first Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia made a Statement to the Nation that committed the church to making a critical but constructive contribution to Australia's political life. It is appropriate, therefore, that on Social Justice Sunday we reflect on both what we have achieved as a nation and what changes we still need to make.

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Suggestions for worship leaders

The theme for Social Justice Sunday is *A future for all Australians: reflecting on the centenary of Federation*. It is about being Christian and Australian. It is about celebration and thanksgiving for the things Australians enjoy, sorrow for our failures as a nation, a sense of vision about what Australia might be, and commitment to working for a just Australia in which all Australians have dignity and share a future.

It is important to "dress" the worship space – to create a context in which the words of the liturgy have life. Use the worship table, the floor, the walls, perhaps even the ceiling. Some ideas: native flowers and leaves, the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. It is possible to get different maps that show: geography, Indigenous peoples, industry, flowers, fauna, or pictures of the people who make up Australia, especially those whose voices we are listening to in this liturgy, newspaper articles and pictures on Australian issues. You may choose to use slides, overhead projector images, and video.

This booklet provides several types of resources to assist congregations to reflect on how their Christian commitment and Australian citizenship interact with one another:

- Liturgy for Social Justice Sunday and some alternative prayers
- Statements on the nature of Australian citizenship
- Key materials on the UCA's understanding of Christian responsibility in Australia as a democracy
- Questions for reflection, which could be used for small group discussion of the key materials
- A further resource list

Some congregations may choose to listen to the voices of lamentation and hope below, then hear the readings and spend a short time of silent meditation on what they have heard – rather than going to the intergenerational activities and sermon.



Voices

Many people had little or no say in the move towards Federation and the development of Australia's constitution. It is important that as we celebrate and reflect on the Centenary of Federation, we listen to the voices of groups that were ignored or expected to be silent 100 years ago. The voice of the land itself also needs to be heard.

The voice of the Creator, the land and its people



The Creator Spirit is crying because the deep spiritual bonds with the land and its people have been broken. The land is crying because it is slowly dying without this bond of spiritual life. The people are crying because they long for a restoration of that deep spiritual bond with the Creator Spirit and the Land.

The Creator Spirit is crying because the sacred places of the land have been desecrated. The land is crying because the stories and rites associated with these sacred places are being forgotten. The people are crying because they have lost the power to maintain their sacred places.

The Creator Spirit is crying because the land is dispossessed. The land is crying because the people assigned by the Creator Spirit to be its custodians have been torn from the land by force. The people of the land are crying because they are unable to fulfil their responsibilities as custodians of the land.

The Creator Spirit is crying because the life-forces formed in the land are being destroyed. The land is crying because these life-forces are not bringing forth rich vegetation and abundant animal life. The people are crying because they are prevented from maintaining the law that once maintained this life.

The Creator Spirit is crying because the blood of Aboriginal people has desecrated the land. The land is crying out because the blood shed on the land has not been heard, and the sacrifice of those who died has not been remembered. The people are crying because the crimes committed against their ancestors have not been revealed and properly recognised.

The Creator Spirit is crying because those bonds which linked people to the land and sustained family structures have also been broken. The land is crying because families no longer know where or how they are linked to the land. People are crying because families are broken and torn by the evils of an alien social order.

The Creator Spirit is crying because the land and its people are in bondage to the Pharaoh of Western culture. The land is crying because it is not given the rest and respect which would enable it to be restored. The people are crying out to be free once again to be responsible for the land and to make it free.

From Rainbow Spirit Theology by the Rainbow Spirit Elders, Melbourne HarperCollins Religious, 1997

Indigenous Leaders

Thirty years on, I look back and see that the Commonwealth has failed to make full use of its race power for the benefit of Indigenous peoples. Thirty years from now, will we look back and say that in 1997 the Commonwealth decided to use the Constitution to entrench racism in this country?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, in the Fifth Report, 1997, page 51.

After ten years of promoting and encouraging the process of reconciliation the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has suggested a treaty process is the next step in true reconciliation. This process would look at issues such as the status in the constitution of the Indigenous peoples of Australia as the original custodians of the land, and the constitutional protection of Indigenous peoples' rights including land and sea rights, and cultural rights.

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

Women

The lives and achievements of women in Australia since Federation are worthy of celebration. Their struggle to be heard, to take their place in public forums, to advocate for safety, and to stand against injustice, brought about changes in status and identity. At the beginning of a new century and a new millenium, the voices of women still need to be heard. Issues such as a continued advocacy for equal opportunity in the workplace; vigilance regarding domestic violence against women and children; greater opportunities for a flexible lifestyle; the interconnection of issues of gender and ethnicity to form a grid of injustice for women, especially among those from other than Anglo-Celtic backgrounds; and the need for women to have a choice in their own fertility; still need to be addressed.

Uniting Church National Consultant, Gospel and Gender, Colleen Geyer

Refugees and asylum seekers

Comments from people in Australian detention centres

We left our countries because we were being arrested and tortured. We came here seeking protection, and the same thing has happened to us here. We have been arrested and imprisoned. And the long periods of detention are psychological torture.

When we arrived they held us in separation. There we have no contact with the outside world – no TV, radio, newspapers, phones. We were not even allowed to phone our families. Some people have been held in separation for as long as 15 months. Their families back home are desperate, not knowing if they are alive or dead.

We are suffering a lot here from long periods of detention, especially our children. This is a crime against humanity. This place is like the Bastille, only they didn't keep children in there.

Bev Fabb, Deacon at Port Headland, comments:

The second verse of national anthem says:
"For those who've come across the seas,
we've boundless plains to share."

We were singing this verse in a community celebration on Australia Day. The thought crossed my mind that these lines from our national anthem could be used as a slogan in our campaign regarding asylum seekers/boat people. Can we use these lines to remind Australians that we have a proud heritage of welcoming people from across the sea to our land and what a valuable contribution they have made to our nation?

Children and young people

Citizenship is not only for adults. Yet a hundred years after federation, children and young people are still not adequately recognised as citizens. *UnitingCare* Burnside asked children about their experience of Australia.

What is good about being a child in Australia?



- Koalas
- You can see the stars and moons
- There's lots of trees and lollies
- We have lots of parades
- Fun
- Not many other countries do as many things as we do
- We have good food and places to sleep and lots of money and we are looked after well and we get all our doses for chicken pox and everything so we don't get sick and we have good education

What is not so good about being a child in Australia?



- If you ride your bike without a helmet the police will pull you up
- You're not old enough to do some things
- Putting people in jail is unfair
- Criminals
- Prostitutes
- Cutting down all the trees

Do you think life in Australia is not good for some children?

- Homeless children and poor children... yes. Because they don't get all the things that other kids get and everything and it's not fair for them.

What do you think children in Australia need?

- Food
- A mother and a father
- They need to be not thought of as just kids. They need to be thought just as important as adults, not just, 'oh- they're just kids, we won't pay any notice to what they say.' They (adults) have to take more notice of what they say.
- Adults don't take enough notice of kids and what they say and what they like. They think they know what we like.

How could Australia be a better place for children?



- Have more parks
- It's a lot of fun (better than being in another country) (Note: several kids agreed with this)
- It's a good place except for the shootings and stabbings
- Put all the criminals in jail (Note: this is the same child who said putting people in jail is unfair)

UnitingCare Burnside's recent submission to the Commission for Children and Young People's Inquiry into Children With No One To Turn To, November 2000, includes a major section on "children's citizenship". They explain:

The main barrier to children and young people being able to access the information and support they need is the way our society views them as 'less than' full citizens, with limited rights within the wider society. This view is challenged by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular the key element of participation (Article 12) which sets out the child's right to express their views in all matters affecting the child, and the child's right to be heard...

The fact that the Convention has not been incorporated into Australian federal domestic legislation reflects the lack of commitment by the federal government to this important point of inclusion...

...Burnside believes that creating the conditions for enabling children to exercise their citizenship rights is the most important pathway to inclusion of children and young people (particularly those who have experienced economic, social and educational disadvantage) in the community in a way that is centred on their needs and desires.

People with disabilities

"Accessible transport is not about providing access to buses for people in wheelchairs. It is far broader than that and includes infrastructure such as footpaths and buildings, and all modes of transport. If we have good access the frail aged, people with temporary disabilities and parents with young children in strollers all benefit as does the general community." *Maurice Corcoran*

"Rather than regarding disability as needing to be 'tacked-on' to telecommunications as an afterthought, in fact disability may provide exemplary paradigms for other users. Its considerations can ensure that new technologies can be empowering rather than confining for people with disabilities themselves. The need for this is also demonstrated with the Internet and other forms of networked communications, which are yet to become fully accessible for people with disabilities." *Christopher Newel and Gerard Goggin*

Both quotes appear in Disability with Attitude: Critical Issues 20 Years after the International Year of Disabled Persons. Conference Proceedings, pages 63, 93. February 2001, University of New South Wales and University of Western Sydney.



People from non-Anglo backgrounds

Pictured, Hayley Eves – the 15 year old Korean who spoke at the commemoration of the Opening of the Australian Parliament at Melbourne’s Royal Exhibition Building.

A 100 years ago, when 12,000 people gathered in this building, a young woman of Asian origin would not have been given the opportunity to stand here and address them...I am young, I’m a woman, and I’m Asian Australian. That I am standing here in front of you demonstrates clearly that we have changed.

I hope in 100 years time, when Australians gather here once again, that if they are addressed by a female head of state, a female prime minister and a female leader of the opposition, no-one will think it unusual...I also hope in the future our head of state is one of us, lives amongst us and is determined by the Australian people.

Photo: Paul Harris, Sydney Morning Herald

Professor Mary Kalantzis in her third lecture of the Barton Lecture Series commented:

We are forgetting that the primary motivation for Federation, the only issue on which Australia really wanted to maintain an independent line from London, was race. Federation set in place three distinctively local initiatives: White Australia, protection of the industry and trade of White Men, and a regime of racial separation for Aborigines. The first two provided the new Commonwealth with some of its finest and most impassioned public rhetoric. The last was a new way of still not having to speak about historical processes which could, had one chosen to talk, with justification have been called invasion and genocide.

Understanding the Nation

Most of us know very little about how our nation has identified itself or defined citizenship. It is appropriate, both as Australian citizens and as Christians, that we know and reflect on these matters.

Preamble to Australian constitution



Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble federal Commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and under the Constitution hereby established:

And whereas it is expedient to provide for the admission into the Commonwealth of other Australasian colonies and possessions of the Queen:

Be it therefore enacted by the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows.

Note: Western Australia joined later and is not mentioned in the preamble.

For reflection and discussion: There has been debate about whether the Constitution should continue to include a reference to God, as Australia is a pluralist society. What do you think are the problems with keeping the reference to God? What are the dangers of removing any reference to God?

Citizenship pledge



From this time forward, under God*,
I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people,
whose democratic beliefs I share,
whose rights and liberties I respect,
whose laws I will uphold and obey.

**All new citizens have the choice of making the pledge with or without the words “under God”.*

For reflection and discussion: What do you think this pledge means? People with Australian citizenship from birth do not have to make this pledge – do you think it would make a difference to the way we understood citizenship if we all had to make this pledge at some point in our lives?

Citizenship rights and responsibilities

The Department of Immigration describes Citizenship Responsibilities and Privileges in this way.

Immigrants becoming Australian citizens have the same basic responsibilities and privileges as Australian-born citizens. They:

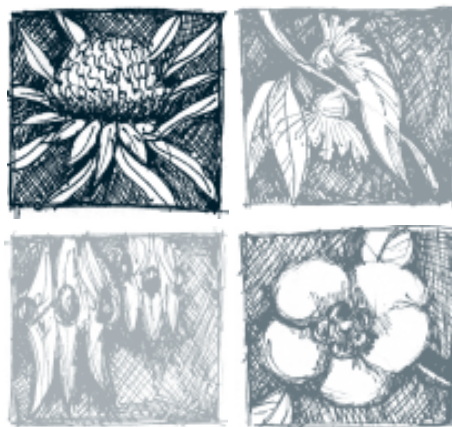
- must enrol on the electoral register and vote in elections;
- may apply for appointment to public office, nominate to stand for election as a Member of Parliament,
- may apply to enlist in the defence forces or for those Government jobs for which citizenship is required;
- may apply for an Australian passport;
- may re-enter Australia without the need for a re-entry visa when they travel overseas;
- have the right to be protected by Australian diplomatic arrangements while they are overseas;
- may register their children born subsequently overseas as Australian citizens.

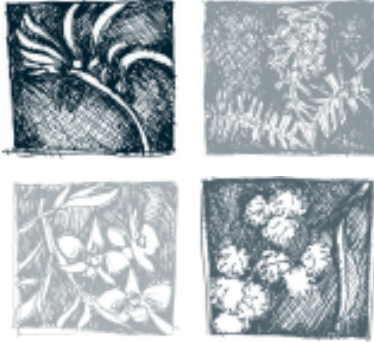
Those accepting citizenship are expected to be loyal to Australia and its people, share in the belief of the democratic process, respect the rights and liberties of other Australians, and uphold and obey Australia’s laws. They must serve on a jury if called to do so, and must help defend Australia should the need arise.

For reflection and discussion: This is what is included in the citizenship act. Is it an adequate expression of what it means to be a responsible citizen? What else would you add? See, for example, the pledge that migrants take when they become citizens, the Statement for Reconciliation, the national anthem and the Uniting Church statements to the Nation in 1977 and 1988.

Australia’s national anthem

Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;
We’ve golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature’s gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history’s page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.





Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
 We'll toil with hearts and hands;
 To make this Commonwealth of ours
 Renowned of all the lands;
 For those who've come across the seas
 We've boundless plains to share;
 With courage let us all combine to
 Advance Australia Fair.
 In joyful strains then let us sing,
 Advance Australia Fair.

For reflection and discussion: What do we really mean when we sing this anthem? For example: Who provides “nature’s gifts”? What does it mean to rejoice? What does it mean to be “fair”? What does it mean to “Advance Australia Fair”?

What is a Commonwealth? What does this mean for the unemployed who want to work, but cannot find a job? What do we want to be renowned for? Do we share our “boundless plains”? Whose “boundless plains” do we share? And whom do we share them with? Why do we need courage?

What is it about Australia that makes us rejoice? What other feelings do we have about Australia?



UCA understanding of church-state relationships

UCA Inaugural Assembly, June 1977, Statement to the Nation

People of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches have united.

A new church has been born. We, who are members of the first Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia address the people of Australia in this historic moment. The path to unity has been long and at times difficult, but we believe this unity is a sign of the reconciliation we seek for the whole human race.

We acknowledge with gratitude that the churches from which we have come have contributed in various ways to the life and development of this nation. A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.

We are conscious of our responsibilities within and beyond this country. We particularly acknowledge our responsibilities as one branch of the Christian church within the region of South-East Asia and the Pacific.

In these contexts we make certain affirmations at the time of our inauguration.

We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices

wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond.

We affirm the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms.

We will challenge values which emphasise acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others and which encourage a higher standard of living for the privileged in the face of the daily widening gap between the rich and poor.

We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.

Finally, we affirm that the first allegiance of Christians is God, under whose judgment the policies and actions of all nations must pass. We realise that sometimes this allegiance may bring us into conflict with the rulers of our day. But our Uniting Church, as an institution within the nation, must constantly stress the universal values which must find expression in national policies if humanity is to survive. We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere — the family of the One God, the God made known in Jesus of Nazareth, the One who gave His life for others.

In the spirit of His self-giving love we seek to go forward. Amen



A Liturgy for Social Justice Sunday 2001

A FUTURE FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

Reflecting on the Centenary of Federation

*The notes in italics give some suggestions about how to work with symbols and as part of the liturgy.
The prayers can be adapted for combining with other ideas.*

Call to Worship

Psalm 117

Acknowledgement of traditional owners



To those who were there before us
To those who loved and cared for this land from time immemorial,
its Indigenous peoples:
***We honour your traditional ownership of this land,
the land on which we meet today,
and offer you our deep respect.***

Hymn of Praise

Thanksgiving

The worship centre is prepared with a large outline of Australia and becomes the centre of our thanksgiving:

Mother –Father God,
We thank you for our nation, Australia,
for this ancient land with its rich colours,
its unique plants and living creatures.

Native flowers and leaves and symbols of animals and birds are placed within the map

We bring you our thanks.
Thanks be to God!

We thank you, O God, for the Indigenous peoples
whose long life here challenges us to learn
how to live in a new harmony with each other and the land.

Symbols of the life of Indigenous people are placed

We bring you our thanks.
Thanks be to God!

We thank you for the diverse cultures that make up Australia, O God,
for recent arrivals who invite us to build a community here
which is as rich as your own creative imagination, O God.

Symbols of different cultures are placed

We bring you our thanks.
Thanks be to God!

We thank you, O God, for the freedoms and gifts of service and care
which lie in our political systems and community life.

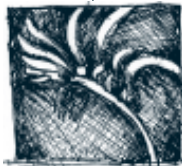
*Symbols of education and health care, the justice system, community organisations and freedom of religion,
are named and placed*

We bring you our thanks.
Thanks be to God!

We thank you that over the past century
you have given Australia many leaders
who sought to be faithful to you as well as the nation
and have helped us move towards justice and human rights.
Especially we give thanks for those we remember in our own community:

Leaders are named and their names are placed

We bring you our thanks.
Thanks be to God!





We rejoice in your generosity to us, O God.
 All that we have comes from you
 and your light will guide us on.

Amen.

A Christ-candle is lit in the centre

Voices of lament and hope

Select from voices provided in the background material

Confession

Gracious God,
 We make our confession on behalf of ourselves and our nation.
 We place a “bowl of tears” in the centre of our life:
A bowl of water is placed in the centre
 We confess that many of the people
 who were ignored at the time of Federation,
 continue to struggle in Australia today.
 We have failed to honour Indigenous Australians,
 and continue to disadvantage and marginalise them.
 Women still struggle to protect themselves
 from physical and institutional abuse and violence.
 Many people who live in isolated and remote areas
 struggle with poverty, lack of health care and access to basic services.

Forgive us

Forgive our nation O God

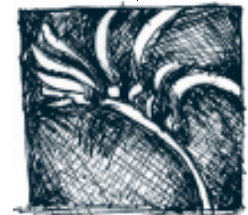
We confess that
 we have failed at times to protect and value children,
 and have tolerated families living in poverty,
 We have failed to welcome asylum seekers from other lands,
 ignoring the pain of their journey here.
 We have not cared adequately for the land,
 trampling over it as we built this nation,
 and imposing our will upon it.

Forgive us

Forgive us as a nation

when we fall short of your hopes for us, O God.

Amen.



Assurance of Pardon

In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and the nation redeemed.
 God gives us a new beginning.

Before it breaks from the bud it is announced to us!

Thanks be to God.

Amen

Intergenerational activity

Readings

Hymn of Faith

Sermon

God's call to work for a just, inclusive nation

See resource material

Collect

***O God who calls the nations
 To do justice, love mercy and walk humbly,
 So that all may experience reconciliation and peace,
 We commit Australia to you,
 And ask that you may challenge, guide and redeem us
 In this new century of our nation's history.
 In the name of Christ our Saviour. Amen***





Affirmation of Faith

National Reconciliation Declaration

(in notes – or see alternative affirmation)

Hymn – Responding to the Word

Announcements

Offering

Symbols or drawings from the intergenerational activity may be brought forward as part of the offering

Mother - Father God,
In bringing these gifts
we bring ourselves, our church and our nation to you.
Take our gifts and use them,
that all may experience your love, mercy and generosity.
In the name of the Christ. Amen

Intercession

People are invited to pray for different aspects of the Australian journey and to place a tea-candle near the symbols of that part of the journey

AND/OR



God who is father and mother of all the nations of the world,
we pray for our Government and all decision-makers in Australia:
Guide them and guide us all.
We pray for unity for our nation
and for your continuing presence among us.
Enable us to accept each others' differences,
reshape us as we celebrate the new life you bring.
God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying

We pray for the traditional owners of our land:
May we be open to new ways of listening to the stories of our shared history,
generous as we seek a future together,
that we may embrace all reconciliation requires.

God of all nations

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying



We pray for children,
that all may have the opportunities to develop their unique potential and capabilities.

We pray for all children to be loved by at least one adult,
for all children to have a sense of safety and security,
for all children to have a childhood – to be able to play and explore.

God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

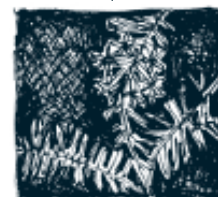
A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying

We pray for women,
that you will sustain their courage, strength and commitment to change
as they continue the struggle to find an equal place in national life
and to have their voices respected and heard.

God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying



We listen for the pain of our community.
We pray for those who live in rural and remote communities,
who struggle with isolation and poverty,
who seek to know what their future might hold.



We pray for those who are unemployed,
for those who are homeless or live in poverty
Or whose lives are damaged by drug addiction
We pray for new ways of knowing
who is excluded and alienated among us,
how to work together and share responsibility
for all people within our nation.

God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying

We cry with those who have no place to call home,
and who come to us seeking a new future.
We pray for asylum seekers and new migrants,
that they might know the warmth of a welcoming embrace.
We pray for justice in our policies and practices
as we seek to welcome strangers into our communities.

God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying



We reach out to feel the pain of our land,
the cracks in the deserts, and bruises in the bush lands,
the naked city landscapes and fragile forests.
Teach us to be good carers and custodians of this your land,
that we might live as people who respect all that you created.

God of all nations:

Hear our prayer for Australia and warm our hearts with your light.

A candle is lit from the Christ-candle and placed among the symbols of journeying

We sit in the silence, and listen for the voices around us:

A silence is kept

Great Creator Spirit,
may we truly live as your people in this land.
We hold before you all we hope for
and all we seek to be.
May your will be done.

Amen

Hymn – Discipleship
Blessing and Dismissal

Let us go out,
walking gently on the land beneath us
breathing lightly the air of the desert, the forest and the city.
Let us go out,
seeking to be a nation of justice and holiness
struggling to reconcile our history and our future.
Let us go out,
listening for the voices of our neighbours and our friends
living out our commitment to Christ daily.

And may God who is the creator of Australia, give us power,
Christ, who teaches us to be a just Nation, give us courage
and the Spirit, who travels with us in our journey together, be our inspiration.

Amen.



UCA Assembly 1988 - Statement to the Nation

In this country which has been inhabited for 40,000 years, the Australian nation is celebrating the Bicentennial of the first European settlement. The Uniting Church, now in its second decade, greets our fellow Australian citizens on this occasion.

We give thanks for those times when the Australian society has established justice, equality, and mutual respect among people; has placed care for the people who have least above sectional interests; has welcomed new migrants and refugees; has exercised solidarity and friendship in times of crisis in Australia across divisions of race and culture; and has engaged constructively with the peoples of Asia, the Pacific and the rest of the world as peacemaker.

In the last two centuries the movements of history have brought together here in one nation, people of diverse cultures. As a church which is itself composed of people of many cultures and races, both Aboriginal and migrant, we rejoice in the vision of a multicultural society where these peoples may live together in unity and diversity, maintaining different cultural traditions, yet forging a common destiny based on commitment to the ideals of equality of opportunity, tolerance, justice and compassion.

At the same time, those of us who have migrated to Australia in the last two centuries or are the descendants of migrants, confess that all of us are beneficiaries of the injustices that have been inflicted on those of us who were Aboriginal people. In varying degrees, we all contribute to, and perpetuate those injustices. We recognise the violence which has been done to the Aboriginal people in the colonisation of this continent and the injustice by which Aborigines have been deprived of the land. We recognise the continuing Aboriginal experience of violence and injustice.

The integrity of our nation requires truth; the history of Australia, as it is taught in educational institutions or popularised in the media, must cease to conceal the reality and nature of Aboriginal society before invasion, what was done to them in colonisation, and what has been the fate and status of Aborigines within the Australian nation.

The integrity of our nation will be measured by action; by legislative action which honours the Aboriginal plea for justice, and by popular action by which the Australian people express their willingness to support Aboriginal

Australians in the quest for justice and their struggle to reconstruct their society.

As for the Uniting Church in Australia, in obedience to God, in concern for the integrity of our nation, and in co-operation with all citizens of goodwill, we Aboriginal and newer Australians have determined to stand together.

In co-operation with all fellow Australians of goodwill, we are committed to work for justice and peace, calling for honesty and integrity, encouraging tolerance and compassion, challenging acquisitiveness and greed, opposing discrimination and prejudice, condemning violence and oppression and creating a loving and caring community.

We are conscious of conflicts and tensions within the nation and the world. We deplore the divisions of humanity along racial, cultural, political, economic, sexual and religious lines. In obedience to God, we struggle against all systems and attitudes which set person against person, group against group, or nation against nation.

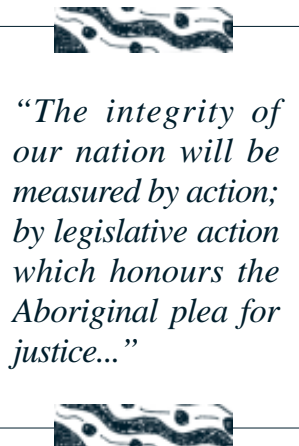
We recognise a widening gap between the rich and the poor, not only within

Australia, but within the whole human community. We will strive to uphold the rightful claims of the poor on the resources of this nation and the world. We will seek to identify and challenge all social and political structures and all human attitudes which perpetuate and compound poverty.

We affirm our belief that the natural world is God's creation; good in God's eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life. Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies. We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation.

As a Christian church, born out of the struggles of Australian Christians to live in obedience to God in Australia, we find hope in Jesus Christ. We recognise that we Australian people are of diverse faiths and cultures and our desire is that we live together here in one community in justice, peace and mutual respect.

May the peace of God be with us all.





Benchmarks for a nation

Australia's human rights commitments

How can Christians evaluate the actions and policies of their nation? The 1977 and 1988 Statements to the Nation rely on international human rights standards. Churches were involved in the development of these standards in the mid 20th Century. Governments around the world, including the Australian government, have ratified these standards as the minimum standards any government should meet.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights covers the right to life, the right to liberty and security of person, rights when arrested and accused of crime, freedom of movement, equality of treatment before the law, rights regarding a fair trial, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, right to found a family, right of child to name, nationality and protection, right to participate in public and political life, equality before the law, and the right to enjoy one's own culture alone and in community.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights covers the right of peoples to self determination, right to freedom from discrimination, right to work and to fair wages and conditions, right to form trade unions, the right to social security, right to protection of the family, right to an adequate standard of living for oneself and one's family, right to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, right to education, right to take part in cultural life and to benefit from one's intellectual property, the right to benefit from scientific development.

The various conventions regarding particular groups apply these general rights to the particular situation of people whose human rights are often at risk. These include conventions on the rights of the child, the rights of women, rights of people with disabilities, and freedom from racial discrimination and intolerance.

Australia, in ratifying these instruments has undertaken first, to ensure Australians experience these rights, and second, to report to the UN on how this is being accomplished.

Do we need a bill of rights?

While most Australians take their human rights for granted, there is little legal protection for many of these rights. Australian governments have often seen these rights as something that can be granted, and taken away by government.

While the courts have protected some rights, the courts have often been reluctant to recognise human rights standards if this means finding laws invalid. When they make findings in favour of the human rights of citizens, such as *Mabo* and *Wik*, the courts are often accused of over-riding parliament, even though the Australian Government has ratified the relevant human rights conventions.

Few human rights standards have been incorporated into Australian law. The processes by which Australian policies are developed seems to give little place to consideration of human rights.

Australian parliamentarians travelled to London for celebrations on June 6, 2000 to mark the 100 years since the British House of Commons passed the Australian Constitution. Amnesty International commented that "A constitution lacking human rights guarantees is nothing to celebrate." They explained:



Human rights protection in Australia largely remains subject to an outdated British-Australian "gentlemen's agreement" that international standards do not need to be enshrined in law.

In human rights terms, there is nothing to celebrate about the Australian Constitution. When passed, it deliberately excluded Asians on racist grounds and ignored even the existence of Aborigines. Today the Constitution still lacks fundamental rights and freedom.

Uniting Church representatives to recent parliamentary inquiries have found that politicians are often very reluctant to recognise human rights and evaluate policy proposals accordingly. Yet both the Coalition and the Labour Party acknowledge that human rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable.

Parliaments have paid little attention to the reports of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, especially those regarding Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

For reflection and discussion: Is it time Australia had a bill of rights that incorporated these basic standards into Australian law? What other measures need to be taken to ensure that Australians continue to enjoy their human rights.



Reconciliation

The Uniting Church in Australia has committed itself to the national process of reconciliation with Aboriginal people. Preachers might choose to focus on this theme, using resources already available. Whether or not it is the theme of the sermon, it would be appropriate for congregations to use the Declaration towards Reconciliation as a statement of faith.

The Declaration Towards Reconciliation (Council for Reconciliation)

We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation.

We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters.

We recognise this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent.



Reaffirming the human rights of all Australians, we respect and recognise continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

Through understanding the spiritual relationship between the land and its first peoples, we share our future and live in harmony.

Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. Many steps have been taken, many steps remain as we learn our shared histories.

As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.



We desire a future where all Australians enjoy their rights, accept their responsibilities, and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, overcome disadvantage, and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination within the life of the nation.

Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000



What is God saying to us as citizens of Australia?

Sermon Notes – Lectionary

Jeremiah 8:18 - 9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Tim 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

What a parable to have for Social Justice Sunday! The parable worried interpreters even in Luke's day. Is it saying, perhaps, that if rogues can be clever in doing wrong, we ought to be clever in doing right? That is how 16:8b understands it. Is it commending the idea that we do favours to people in debt, so that they will later repay us on earth or, perhaps, in heaven? That is implied in 16:9. The parable certainly set people thinking about money and what Jesus had said about it. We see that in 16:10-12 and also in 16:13. These are challenging statements: what governs our values, our nation? Monetary gain? Where are people in all this?

The original parable is a shock. The manager is a rogue. He is supposed to act for his master. What right has he got to be cancelling and reducing debts? It is possible to imagine that some people also saw Jesus as a rogue. What right did he have to go about offering forgiveness and acceptance to people who were in debt to God? It may well be that this is another parable in which Jesus is replying to his critics. He is doing just that in the previous chapter when he likens himself to a woman looking for a coin, a shepherd looking for a lost sheep, and a parent who never stops loving his child. Chapter 15:1-2 is probably also the background for today's parable. Defiant to the last, Jesus asserts that God will commend him. Those who objected to the roguery of divine grace had lost the plot.

Easter celebrates God's yes to Jesus the rogue. The radically inclusive Jesus, contrary to the critics' expectations, speaks right from the heart of God. He challenged the nation then and challenges our nation now to think about what it is saying about God and about people.

The passages from Jeremiah and from the Psalm portray pain and suffering. Both are laments of people who have seen their city devastated. The bloody devastation of Jerusalem, by the Babylonians in 586 and later by the Seleucids and Romans, left people wounded and in despair. It is a wounding and despair which all peoples experience when overwhelming forces cut them down,

take their cherished land, and so scar their memory for generations. Before all solutions and resolutions, before the mending and reconstitution of relations, there must be space for lament. Nations need to lament, to hear the voices of lament and pain within them, and not be afraid of that space.

Both Old Testament passages invite us into that kind of space. It is the space where we listen to stories and hear the crying. It is very hard to maintain the space, because people fear the uncertainty and want either to rush in with solutions or to make it more comfortable with explanations. These passages are not designed to solve problems or give theological explanations. They are just there giving us permission.

In contrast to their turbulence, 1 Timothy 2:1-7 is rather proper. Its focus is 'a quiet and peaceable life'. We are to pray for people in government. It comes from a different time and place. Law and order made it possible for young Christian communities to continue their work. Piracy and banditry were held in check; the sea lanes and roads were safe. Caring for such things also belongs to community, but it belongs in the context of 'the one God' and the roguery of the mediator, Jesus.



Sermon Notes - Alternative Readings

Isaiah 25: 6-8; Psalm 117; Colossians 1: 15-20; Matthew 25:31-46

In reflecting on our life as a nation, we need to begin not with criteria, or judgement, but with the love of God. The Biblical witness is that nations commit sin, but God offers forgiveness and new life. We can face who we are, because we know God loves us.

At the centenary of federation, we have the opportunity to evaluate our national life. The Uniting Church in Australia has published two statements to the nation to assist us in that evaluation. They set out a vision for a just and inclusive nation, where there is reconciliation between the First Peoples and later arrivals and where the human rights of all are respected.

As Christians, we look forward to the Messianic banquet described in Isaiah – to the day when all people can sit down together and enjoy the good things God has given us in this world. The day when God wipes away all tears. We rejoice in the Christ who is present among the people whom society forces to the fringes. We rejoice that Christ works always to bring about reconciliation, to bring about wholeness not only in individuals, but in the nation and the world.

Only some people had a say in Federation. The creation of Australia as a nation was a long way from the inclusive vision described by Isaiah.

Since then, Australia has changed the Constitution and the basis for citizenship. Indigenous Australians are citizens, and the Commonwealth has both the right and responsibility to make laws that ensure their wellbeing. Australia has ratified the international human rights covenants. There are various forms of legislation that prevent discrimination on grounds of gender, marital status, race, and disability. The White Australia policy has gone.

Our basic constitutional arrangements have worked well – government, executive, and courts. We live under “the rule of law”, and can disagree with one another about matters such as the republic without resorting to armed conflict. Australia appears to have moved closer to the inclusive vision of Isaiah. But we still have a long way to go. There are still too many tears to be wiped away.

Australia still needs to work for Reconciliation. There are still racist attitudes to be overcome.

Australia has for much of its history prided itself on its egalitarianism – its sense of equality and a fair go for everyone. Workers could expect a living wage. People contributed to the wellbeing of all through a progressive tax system, related to ability to pay. The social security system has been adapted over the years to provide not only aged pensions, but other forms of income support such as family allowance, unemployment benefits, disability pensions, and sole parent benefits. Until recently, there was a high level of home ownership. The nation enjoys a high level of general health and education.

All these measures are consistent with the expectations placed upon nations in Matthew 25, with its concern about enough food to eat, housing, health and humane treatment for the prisoner. But again, the nation has some way to go. In recent years, changes to industrial relations law and income support arrangements seem to have paid little heed to human rights requirements. There is an increasing gap between rich and poor. The tax system has been made less progressive, and some flat rate taxes have been introduced. There is constant pressure to turn to privatised medicine instead of retaining the universal health care system. In some areas of social policy where Australia was once a world leader, it has now fallen well behind.

Christianity is not part of life, but the whole of life. We do not cease to be Christians when we enter the ballot box, or when we engage in other aspects of political life. God in Christ showed his love to all the world, including this nation, Australia. God constantly offers us forgiveness where we have fallen short, and new beginnings, so that we can move on.

We need to hear the voices of those who still feel excluded from this nation. We need to carry within us the biblical vision of a just and inclusive nation. We need to draw on our Christian heritage, and our wisdom as a church, to guide our evaluation of proposed national directions. We are both Christian, and Australian. Christ’s redeeming work enables us to live out both those responsibilities in a faithful way.



Possible hymns

Possible hymns from the *Australian Hymn Book* include: 61, 92, 104, 109, 112, 214, 205, 518, 561, 562, 568

Possible Hymns from *Together in Song* include:

158, 161, 163, 168, 179, 281, 315, 473, 531, 618, 640, 665, 672, 674, 687, 688, 690, 692, 694, 751.

Some of Peter Kearney's music picks up on issues raised in this document. See section titled "Intergenerational Activity" below, for suggestions on children's worship music.



Intergenerational activity

A

Divide into small groups. Give each group an outline map of Australia. In each group, people can talk about what they value about Australia, what they are sorry about and what they hope that Australia will be like in the future. These can be recorded as drawings and words on the maps. The maps can then become part of the offering.

OR

B

Discuss the following questions with some of the children, and equivalent questions with some of the adults, in your congregation, as part of the service.

- What is good about being a child in Australia?
- What is not so good about being a child in Australia?
- Do you think life in Australia is not good for some children?
- What do you think children in Australia need?
- How could Australia be a better place for children?

In small groups, draw or make a symbol of Australia, based on the discussion. (**Provide coloured paper, scissors, paints, crayons, and some interesting materials from outside such as leaves, bark, stones**). Symbols could be included in the offering.

OR

C

See material from Alex Mills on the NSW Synod Federation website re: Christians who worked for Federation, <<http://nsw.uca.org.au/centenary/history>> and follow the prompts to the Federation page. Tell the story of one or more of these people.

D

Suggested songs: *God Gives...Songs for Kids* (Book 3, p28)
God made a beautiful world (Book 2, p19)



Alternative liturgical resources

Call to worship and acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land

Let us worship the God who made us:

Great is the faithfulness of God!

Let us worship the Spirit who never leaves us:

Great is the faithfulness of God!

Let us worship the Christ who walks before us,
in this land which we love:

Great is the faithfulness of God to us in every generation!

To those who were there before us

To those who loved and cared for this land from
time immemorial, its Indigenous peoples:

**We honour your traditional ownership of this land,
the land on which we meet today,
and offer you our deep respect.**



Alternative affirmation of faith

We believe in God the Creator,

who goes on creating in us
until all the earth sings with songs of justice
and peace.

We believe in Jesus Christ
whose footsteps of costly life tread the path in
grace

among all peoples of all time,
even with us, who live in this place,
under the stars of the Southern Cross.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who dances in our days,
ceaselessly moving in love
in this great south land,
until it reflects the holy city of God.



What can we do?

Further study

Value your citizenship, and understand it. You are accountable to God for the way you act as citizen. You don't have to be a lawyer to understand the constitution, the parliament, the legal process and the way policy is made.

- **Read the constitution** – there is now material available to help ordinary Australians understand what it is and what it says, and to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses.
- **Read the materials that are available** to help ordinary Australians understand how parliamentary democracy works.
- **Use the materials in this document** as the basis for individual reflection or group discussion.
- **Take action** in support of people who are still marginalised in Australia, although they are citizens. Start, join or do voluntary work for local, regional, or national organisations or task groups that work for justice. (See NSRJ resource book 2001 called *Doing Justice*)
- **Take action** in support of people who are marginalised in Australia because they are not citizens – recent immigrants, especially people who do not speak English well, and asylum seekers.
- **Read *Election 2001: A briefing paper***, sent to your congregation in July – and take up the issues with local candidates in the next election. (Contact your synod or Assembly Social Responsibility and Justice for more copies.)
- **Pray regularly** for the nation – privately and in public worship (See *UnitingCare NSW.ACT brochure: Supporting social justice through prayer*).



Resources and websites

Video

If you have access to a video of the Commemoration of Federation on 1 January 2001, there are some useful segments to use as “voices”.

Prayers

Uniting in Worship People's Book, Prayer: “A rolling Brown Land” page 240.
Many of Bruce Prewer's prayers have an Australian theme.

Federation

Links to major sites with history, pictures, etc: <http://abc.net.au/federation/links.htm>
Church resources: <http://nsw.uca.org.au/centenary>

Constitution

For an introduction to the Constitution and other helpful resources: <http://www.centenary.org.au>

Indigenous people and the land

Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, HarperCollins Religious 1997

Reconciliation

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car>

Human Rights and Social Justice Resources

UnitingCare NSW.ACT <http://nsw.uca.org.au/bsr/social.html>

National Social Responsibility and Justice <http://nat.uca.org.au/nsrj/>

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission <http://www.hreoc.gov.au>

Burnside (1999) *Images of Children: A background paper*, Burnside, Sydney

Citizenship

Peter Botsman, *The great constitutional swindle*, Pluto Press and the Australia Council, 2000

Alastair Davidson, *From Subject to Citizen*, Cambridge University Press, 1997

Children

Harding, A. & Szukalska, A. (2000) *Financial Disadvantage in Australia-1999: The Unlucky Australians?*
A report commissioned by the Smith Family, NATSEM, Canberra

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