



UCA Anniversary

CALL TO WORSHIP

Praise to God for the gifts of the past:
*for the witness of the people of God
who went before us.*

Praise to God for the gifts of the present:
in all our struggles to be true to Christ.

Praise to God for the gifts in our future:
*in the Spirit we are led on
into crucifixions and resurrections.*
Amen

HYMN: “JOYFUL, JOYFUL” (TIS 152)

Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, God of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.

All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heav'n reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain
call to praise you joyfully.

You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean-depth of happy rest.
You our Father, Christ our brother,
all are yours who live in love;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to your joy above.

Henry Van Dyke
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PRAYER

Living and Loving God,
as we gather to celebrate this day
we thank you for
your presence
that is with us throughout our lives,
your faithfulness
that sees us through our days, and
your guidance
which leads us on our way.

Today we thank you for the church
of which we are a part, the Uniting Church.
We thank you for those who had the vision to establish it,
for those who had the audacity to believe you could use it.

We thank you for every person
whose perseverance has brought us to this day.
For every person who has given
energy, time, skill and money.
For every person who has devoted
imagination, wisdom and prayer.

Most of all, our God,
we thank you
that in spite of our failures
you have chosen to work through us,
that in our disappointments
you have given us new hope and enthusiasm,
and despite our apathy
you have been among us,
disturbing us with your presence,
encountering us in your Son and
inspiring us by your Spirit.

Our God,
we confess that we committed ourselves
to be one people in the Spirit of Christ,
but we are still divided.

We committed ourselves to be a pilgrim people,
but often we have refused to move or change.

We committed ourselves to use the gifts of all for the kingdom
but we refuse to call forth the gifts and offer them to you.

We committed ourselves to be servants to the world
but we have focused on our own concerns
and closed our eyes to the pain of others.

Forgive us God,
and help us to renew our commitment
to live out the hope to which we are called.
Amen

In Christ our hope is new every day
and there is no condemnation.
In the Spirit
live as forgiven and free people of God.
Our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

WELCOMING THE MODERATOR

BIBLE READINGS

Hebrews 13:1-8 and John 17:20-26

MESSAGE

Today, on this day before the Anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia, I would like us to engage in looking back, looking at where we are now, and looking forward.

I wonder how many of us remember 22nd June 1977? Were you born then? If so, were you a part of one of the denominations that became the Uniting Church?

Looking back to the time in 1977 when the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian denominations came together to form the Uniting Church in Australia, it seems almost ancient history. But when we think how long ago it was that Jesus spoke those words we heard at the start of today's reading from the gospel of John, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Those words spoken some 2000 years ago were in some way fulfilled, as 3 denominations that were separate became one, giving glory to God. We had a long legacy and many traditions behind us, and we were also prepared to come together to be our own church, with our own mission and priorities.

Many individuals worked tirelessly to prepare the Basis of Union, our founding document that sets out the important ways we are to be the Uniting Church.

Paragraph 1 of the Basis of Union states that the new church is "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will for the Church." Church Union was embedded in, and the outcome of, deep theological convictions.

The Inauguration service was held in the Sydney Town Hall and televised across the nation, with many dignitaries and much ceremony. Photographs taken on the day depict Ministers in black gowns, a large choir and a formally dressed congregation. I discovered just the other day, that the parents of someone I know attended that service; and then had a terrible time getting home due to an airline strike.

Many things that symbolise the Uniting Church were recognised; The Basis of Union which set out the underlying principles that established the Uniting Church has already been mentioned.

The symbol, or logo, of the Uniting Church was unveiled. It was more than an eye catching design. Each part of the symbol had meaning for the denomination.

The cross of Jesus Christ, in its light and love, stands over a darkened, disconnected world, redeeming it through grace and truth.

The wide U at the bottom is an incomplete semicircle, reminding us that we are uniting: in our diversity, we continue to seek a life of connectedness with God, with each other and with our world.

The flame and dove symbolises the Holy Spirit guiding and empowering us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and communities of connection.

Together, we are God's people, sent out to worship, witness and serve.

With us today we have the symbol of the Uniting Church. This is the one that was displayed at the annual Synod meeting last November. If you look closely you will see that it is made up of many small pictures; pictures of people taken at Uniting Church activities; pictures of you and me might be found there. That symbolises what the Uniting Church is – people like you and me – we are the church.

Furthermore, those pictures are not all the same. Unity does not mean uniformity. We are all different: we all have different gifts, we all have different priorities and we see some things differently. This does not stop us being a part of the Uniting Church, this does not stop us relating to those who are not the same as us, nor does it stop us sharing in each other's joys and sorrows. We seek to connect with each other and celebrate the diversity in our unity.

Getting back to that Inauguration Service. Importantly, a Statement to the Nation was read. As I reflect on what is happening in our world at this moment I am drawn to two paragraphs of this Statement and I quote them here.

“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 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.”

Our church today is in many ways different to what it was then, but many of the things we held true then are the same today. Those pledges and aims are important for us today.

At this time, during a pandemic, we care for the vulnerable and needy, we support the Black Lives Matter campaign, we reach out with compassion and comfort to all humanity.

As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews put it; “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.”

And the reading ended “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

The Uniting Church is ongoing; we are fulfilling our calling in these different circumstances. We are still that pilgrim people on a journey toward the promised goal.

And what of the future? This church of ours, with an ancestry stretching back for millennia, a history as a denomination of 43 years, and a future stretching forward beyond what our eyes can see.

Just at the moment we may feel we are in some kind of wilderness, a bit like the Israelites, when after travelling for around 40 days out of the 40 years they were eventually to spend reaching the promised land, decided they had had enough. They grumbled and complained to Moses and Aaron and considered they were better off suffering back in Egypt – at least they knew where their next meal was coming from, and maybe the suffering wasn't too bad after all!

Moses saw God's promise of a path forward, a way to ease the grumbling.

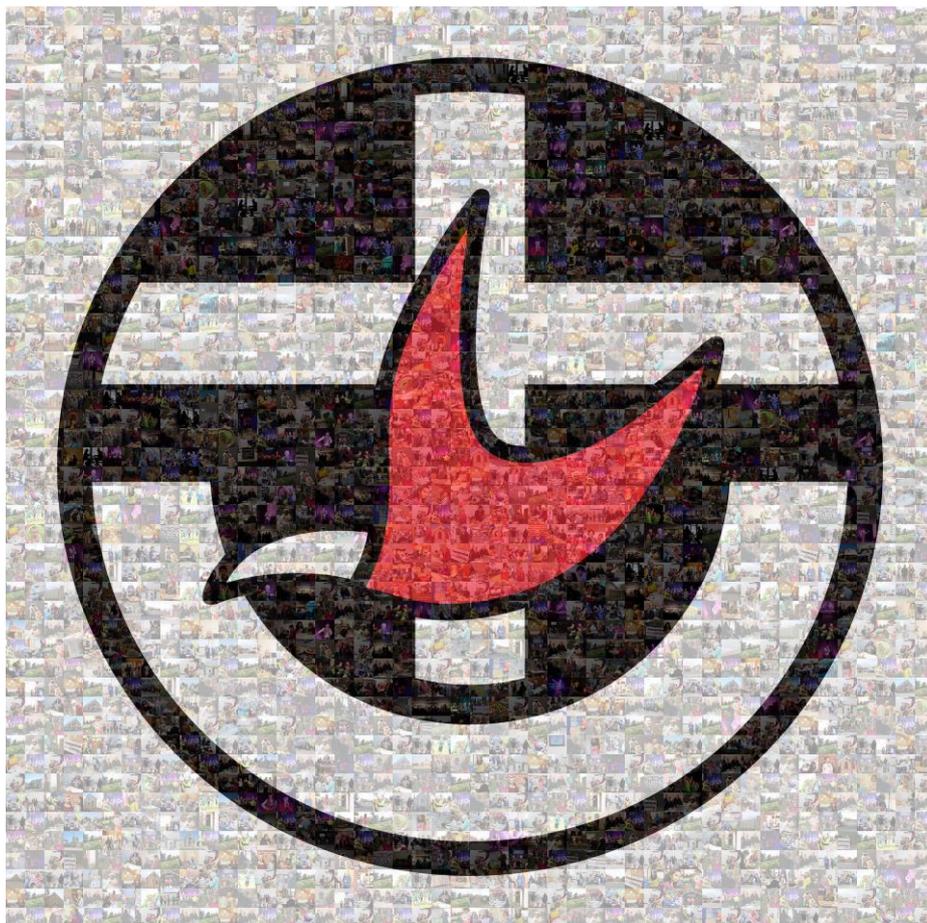
Without drawing the analogy too far, and I certainly hope our current circumstances don't last for another 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ years, we are a bit like that.

We have left what we have known, we are in a kind of wilderness, a time of uncertainty and concern about the way forward.

As we consider the future may we remember that God will provide our needs, as God did for those journeying through the wilderness, those pilgrim people journeying toward the promised land.

As we remember our history may we look to the future, remembering God will provide, the Holy Spirit will guide, and Jesus will walk beside us as together we journey towards the promised goal as the Uniting Church.

Happy Birthday Uniting Church in Australia!



HYMN: "IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST" (TIS 459)

In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

In Christ shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find,
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.

Join hands, then, people of the faith,
whate'er your race may be;
who serves my Father as his child
is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north,
all Christlike souls are one in him
throughout the whole wide earth.

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OFFERING PRAYER

O God, we offer these gifts
and all we are as your church.
Use them and us
for the continuing of your creation
and the coming of your kingdom.
Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Compassionate God,
you built your church on the rock of human faith and trust:
we praise you for Jesus Christ,
the foundation and cornerstone of all we believe.

As we celebrate today, we praise you
for the people of the past,
whose love for your church
made it a willing instrument of your care and mercy;
who placed it first in their lives
and held to their faith in good times and in bad:

Save us, O God, from living in the past,
and from resting on the work and witness of others.
Let us catch a new vision and make a new beginning,
that we may faithfully serve you
in this congregation and in our world today.

Keep us, O God, from lack of reverence for truth and beauty;
from artificial life and worship,
from all that is hollow or insincere.

Spare us, O God, from the pride that excludes others
from the shelter of your love;
from the selfishness that uses your church
as a means of getting social position or personal glory.

That we may not be content with secondhand faith,
worshipping words rather than the Word;
but that we may find joy in study of the Bible,
and growth in exposure to new insights;
O God, be our strength.

That we may be actively engaged in the life of the church
sharing in Christ's mission to the world
and always seeking the common good;
O God, be our strength.

O God, you gave us minds to know you,
hearts to love you,
and voices to sing your praise.
Send the Holy Spirit among us,
that, confronted by your truth,
we may worship and serve you as we should;
through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray:

*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 forever.*

Amen

SONG: THE SUMMONS (ATO 413)

Will you come and follow me,
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare,
will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

J. Bell & G Maule

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BLESSING

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet
walk with us on the road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands
stretch out our hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with wounded heart
open our hearts to love.

May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,
and may everyone we meet see the face of Christ in us

SUNG BLESSING: TIS 774

For the life that you have given,
for the love in Christ made known,
with these fruits of time and labour,
with these gifts that are your own:
here we offer, Lord, our praises;
heart and mind and strength we bring;
give us grace to love and serve you,
living what we pray and sing.

Carl P Daw Jr
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TO PONDER

- The Moderator invited us to think back to the inauguration of the Uniting Church in 1977. Where were you? What were you doing? If you were part of the Uniting Church, what was your sense of the future at the time of inauguration?
- What has your experience of being part of the Uniting Church been like?
- What, for you, are the strengths of the Uniting Church? For what do you give thanks to God for the Uniting Church?
- Are there areas where you would like the Uniting Church to grow and develop?
- What are your hopes for the Church for the future? What are your hopes for Seacliff UC?

A QUOTE

“The confidence of the church is not based on its own strength, but on the grace by which it is created, sustained and equipped for its missional pilgrimage in the world.”

Rev. Dr. Andrew Dutney, “Angels in the Wilderness”. Reflections on the Journey of the Uniting Church in Australia.