

# Day of Mourning

# 2026

A worship service for faith communities to stand in solidarity with Australia's First Peoples, as we remember, reflect and lament the ongoing effects of invasion, forced dispossession, oppression and suffering.



UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER  
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS



Uniting Church in Australia  
ASSEMBLY

# Artwork Story

This artwork is inspired by Isaiah 9:2–3 NIV:

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light... You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy.”*

For countless generations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived according to cultural and spiritual laws grounded in unity, accountability, and deep interdependence with one another and with Country. The impacts of colonisation have left deep spiritual, cultural, and relational wounds; that continue to shape the land and its peoples today. These wounds are acknowledged in this artwork through the black pathway lines, which represent shared sorrow, loss, and lament across the meeting places, and communities.

At the centre of the artwork is a gathering place holding family and community together beneath an ancestral presence. This central space reflects the reality that sorrow is not carried alone but held collectively. From this place, Songlines flow outward, connecting to other community gatherings, where people dance, teach, hunt, and celebrate their culture.

Living connections remind us that healing does not happen in isolation, but moves through relationships, stories, and shared responsibility.

The growth of lighter colours and living pathways across the artwork, symbolises Christ’s redeeming light. This light does not erase the darkness or deny past pain; instead, it brings restoration from within it. Just as Isaiah speaks of joy multiplying like a harvest; new life is shown emerging from places of sorrow, renewing community and strengthening connection.

The figures dancing, gathering, and caring for Country, show that when culture is practiced through song, ceremony, art, and movement, life flourishes and connections can be rebuilt.

In this way, culture itself is an expression of God’s design for community, where people as part of creation, and spirit are held in right relationship.

This artwork invites the church to walk these pathways together: to acknowledge shared sorrow, to listen deeply, and to participate in the work of restoration. As we bless one another and nurture right relationships, we are called to plant new fields for harvest—multiplying joy, strengthening community, and allowing God’s light to continue shining across Country and all its peoples.

## Artist Biography - Zoe Korbe

Zoe Korbe is a Guwa Koa, Kuku Yalanji woman with historical ties to the Wakka Wakka peoples of Cherbourg community. Zoe completed her Bachelor of Nursing at the University of Queensland this year and has been accepted into the 2026 Wesley Hospital Nursing Graduate Program.

Zoe is deeply passionate about breaking down barriers to accessible and safer healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Zoe started her advocacy journey under the mentorship of her mother, Aunties and Elders, as well as through her service as a Youth Leader for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Queensland. Zoe has been a delegate at the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders’ Summit for the past two years, and this experience has strengthened her determination to continue to learn about systems that can support grass roots healing which is informed by self-determined cultural knowledge.

In all her aspiration, Zoe knows that her human endeavours are made possible through the process of deepening her practising faith, sharing time with Elders and listening to God’s whispers into her heart and mind, as they will guide her way.



# Day of Mourning

## INTRODUCTION

**17th December 2025**

**Rev Charissa Suli, President, UCA**

Each year, on the Sunday before 26 January, our Church gathers in truth-telling, lament, and hope as we mark the Day of Mourning. This is not simply an observance—it is a spiritual discipline and a covenant commitment. In 2015, the Assembly accepted the request of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) that our whole Church pause to remember the ongoing impacts of invasion, dispossession, and injustice on First Peoples. Through this request, Congress invited the Church to walk more faithfully in the promises we made in 1994 when we entered into Covenant.

That Covenant named the pain caused when the Church failed to hear the wisdom, spirituality, and leadership of First Peoples. It confessed the harm that came when the gospel of Jesus Christ was confused with colonising ways. And it committed us to a different path—one shaped by humility, truth, justice, and life-giving relationships. This Day of Mourning invites us again to live into that promise, not for one Sunday alone, but as part of an ongoing journey of covenant faithfulness for our whole Church.

We recognise that congregations come to this day carrying different histories, emotions, and understandings. Some approach it with deep sorrow; some with uncertainty; others with a longing to do better. Wherever we are on that journey, we are held by the same God whose love calls us into deeper relationship.

The Scriptures appointed for this Sunday speak powerfully into our shared story. Isaiah promises that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light—a light that does not deny the darkness but transforms it from within.

The artwork accompanying this resource reflects this truth with beauty and courage: the pathways of sorrow, the strength of ancestors, the movement of Christ's healing light through story, community, and Country.

In the gospel, Jesus calls ordinary people to leave old patterns behind and follow him into a new way of life grounded in justice, compassion, and shared purpose. Paul urges the early church to be "knit together" despite their differences—an image that resonates deeply for us as First and Second Peoples seeking a common life marked by respect, equity, and reconciliation.

This resource has been shaped through the leadership, spirituality, and wisdom of UAICC, and we receive it with deep gratitude. It calls the whole Church into worship that is honest, courageous, and filled with the hope of Christ. It invites us to listen deeply, to acknowledge the truth of our shared history, and to participate in God's work of restoration and right relationship across this land.

So, as we gather on Sunday 25 January 2026, we encourage every congregation and community of faith to enter this day with open hearts.

- **Grieve with your First Peoples communities.**
- **Stand in solidarity.**
- **Pray for healing for our nation.**
- **Commit yourselves anew to the long journey of justice, peace, and covenant relationship.**

May the Holy Spirit guide us as we weave threads of love across this land, trusting that God is restoring, renewing, and reconciling all creation.

Grace and peace to you,

**Rev Charissa Suli | President**  
Uniting Church in Australia



# Day of Mourning

## Rev Ken Sumner, Interim National Co-Chair, UAICC

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) observes an annual Day of Mourning for First Peoples on the Sunday before January 26th.

This significant observance, requested by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), is an expression of the UCA's Covenant relationship and commitment to truth-telling and justice. It calls on congregations to:

1. **Lament** the devastating effects of invasion and colonisation, including dispossession, violence, and ongoing injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
2. **Acknowledge** the Church's own complicity in this history.
3. **Affirm** the sovereignty and resilience of First Peoples and honour their continued cultural and spiritual life to Country.
4. **Commit** anew to the journey of reconciliation, healing, and standing in solidarity with First Peoples in their struggle for justice.

There is a continued call for Justice, not Charity – a demand for true self-determination, equality and equity in an honoured shared future together with integrity.

The Day of Mourning provides a crucial moment for deep reflection, confession, listening, and prayer, shaping a shared future for First and Second Peoples in Australia.

## Rev Ken Sumner

Interim National Co-Chair, UAICC



# Day of Mourning

## WORSHIP RESOURCE

### CALL TO WORSHIP

#### PRAYERFUL ACTION:

*(The words in green within the prayer are body actions that the gathered congregation can participate in as the call to worship is spoken. This can be led by the worship leader or others as appropriate)*

Our Lord hears the words of our hearts unspoken  
*(Cross both your hands across your heart)*

The silent tears that fall, when we call for Holy comfort  
*(Cup your palms in front of your chin as a gesture of catching the fallen tears)*

Let us open ourselves to be present and acknowledge each other, and turn our faces towards God  
*(Lower and extend hands with palms facing upwards and turn to the left, then to the right, then towards the altar)*

Listen to the beat of God's love in each of our hearts  
*(Either tap a heartbeat with your hand on your own heart or clap your hands or gently hit clap sticks together as a heartbeat)*

As we stand on lands that are sacred and shared and hold a continued renewing story.  
*(Lightly stamp your feet as a sign of the walk we must continue to take together)*

#### Additional Ideas for Children and Families

Suggested actions for the inclusion of children in the service.

- Children of the congregation could lead the call to worship alongside their youth leaders.
- During the weeks prior to the service, children could create cut outs their own footprints and place them at the altar during the call to worship, as a sign of standing together.
- Children could speak or sing the poem on the last page of this resource.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

As we gather to worship God on this day:

We take a moment to Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Country – the \_\_\_\_\_ people, who have walked with God, cared for Country, and shared their sacred stories on this land for countless generations. We give thanks for the protocols and customs that have sustained their cultural and spiritual existence under God and sustained the creation made for us.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and all First Nations people here today.

We honour the Covenant between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and encourage the Covenant to be lived as part of our collective church life.

We acknowledge that we have not always acted in love and we pray for healing and peace where there is brokenness.

May we all keep learning how to walk gently and humbly upon these lands together.

## HYMN/SONG

## GREETING

Beloved – today we gather on the eve of a day where some people celebrate, others will lament, and another group will hold space to do both.

We hold in our minds and our hearts the tragedy and loss of such violent dispossession, that is the story of how we came to be First and Second peoples of these lands. We lament the unspeakable pain, the lost opportunities, and the brokenness that has been intergenerational.

We also give thanks for the resilience and the quiet strength of First Peoples. For their faith and their grace-filled willingness to share culture and hospitality.

We pray for God's continued grace for each of us as we sit in the discomfort and continue to walk the journey of truth telling.

Our God delights in all of creation and longs for a time that all of creation, including all people will be healed and whole, fully reconciled to God and to each other. We join with this hope to see God's justice and God's peace in this place.

The God of all justice,  
The God of all peace,  
Be with you all.

**And also with you.**

## BLESSINGS FOR A SACRED PLACE

May this land of ancient and enduring story,  
continue to hold us, as it has held countless generations.  
May the winds whisper the truth of those who walked freely,  
whose footsteps echoed in harmony with earth, waters and sky.

May the rivers flow with wisdom,  
the mountains stand as guardians of truth,  
and the trees shelter us in their timeless grace.

We give thanks for First Peoples,  
custodians of spirit and soil,  
whose care and courage sustain the heartbeat of this sacred place.

May we walk with respect,  
listen with humility,  
and live in peace upon this Country,  
now and forever.

## PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

*Inspired by Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-23, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18)*

God, our Light and Salvation,  
forgive us for those moments when we have walked in darkness,  
stumbling in the wilderness of quarrels, division, and bickering.  
You have called us to follow you and to fish for people  
but too often we think that our way is the only way to do your will.  
Forgive us, Lord, for the brokenness that we bring upon ourselves.

(Space for silent confessions and/or a sung kyrie)

God, the Stronghold of our Life,  
hear our cry as we come to you for unity.  
Send your Spirit to gather us as you desire us.  
Remind us that unity does not mean uniformity.  
Teach us that the “same mind” you call us to have  
is not ours, but the mind of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
in whose name we pray. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Dr Stephen M. Fearing*

## WORD OF RECONCILIATION

Hear then Christ’s word of grace to us:  
You are restored, healed, reconciled, forgiven;  
Christ is in you,  
You, too, are a child of God.  
**Thanks be to God.**

## HYMN/ SONG

## THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

### Bible Readings

Revised Common Lectionary for Sunday 25 January: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

#### • Isaiah 9:1-4

9:1 But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

3 You have multiplied exultation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

4 For the yoke of their burden  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

#### • 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been made clear to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified

for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel—and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

• Matthew 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—  
16 the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned.”

17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

23 Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

## SERMON/ REFLECTION THOUGHTS:

*Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.*

*9:3 You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,*

The last 238 years have been a time of deep darkness in this land. Not all people have felt that darkness; some people have benefited while others have been disadvantaged.

But God’s justice calls us to be mindful that when some people are suffering, we all suffer. And God’s justice does not call us to stay in that space but to join God’s mission of restoration, healing and wholeness for all people and all of creation. We do this encouraged that each of us are created in God’s image and likeness – we can celebrate our differences – rejoicing as in Isaiah that the light has come – and the light we now know as Jesus has connected us together.

The apostle Paul appeals to the Corinthians in his first letter (1 Corinthians 1) not to have divisions among them but to be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose – across their differences of teaching, the one thing they had in common was that they all belonged to Christ. In our current context - as people across Australia we all have shared history of this nation... as Christians we are called to love God and love our neighbour as we love ourselves – and this is not limited to neighbours who are the same as us. Just as the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, even though we come from many different heritages as First and Second Peoples from many different lands, we are all followers of Christ together across these differences. The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly refers to our “common life and shared wealth”.

Points offered for reflection when discerning the shared Word for the day.

## DAY OF MOURNING 2026 RESOURCE

- What does God's justice mean in this context?
- Sometimes the best thing we have to offer might be the ability to sit with discomfort and still feel the joy of knowing God.
- The statistics reflected in the Closing the Gap report teach us that, although we are having breakthroughs in certain instances, the current systems of education, health, justice and housing are failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Our faith calls us to notice where God's kingdom is constantly breaking through. Where are we seeing visions of God's justice and where can we take up our responsibilities to contribute?

### ***Some of the learnings from the participants at a recent Gathering in the Spirit for Justice events were:***

- Justice and healing, looks like First Nations women and children not needing to flee from unsafe environments; and if they do, there is somewhere safe for them to go and someone to be present to support and witness.
- Justice and healing, looks like children growing up unafraid of **knowing** each other in the story of their shared history, and **being** unafraid to sit in discomfort of **doing** the work to move forward together in renewing ways.
- Justice and healing, looks like those with power setting aside some of that power and position, to take a posture of humility and deep respect for learning how they can use their power and influence to the greatest effect.
- Justice and healing, looks like First Nations children being supported by those who have been granted authority over them, including their parents, to become the people God intended them to be.
- Justice and healing, looks like building cultural and spiritual support centres where peoples with deep brokenness, can come and be greeted with patience and kindness and given the time and guidance they require to write a new story onto their hearts and minds.
- Justice creates a new language where everyone can participate. Some take the lead, others follow and sometimes the roles and responsibilities are truly shared.
- When we talk about ecumenism (all of us together in Christ), the best people to send into an ecumenical space are those who have the deepest knowledge of themselves and their faith heritage. Those who are secure in their knowledge can more easily hold space for others to share their faith heritage and collaborate for the good of all peoples. We need not be afraid of another's depth of knowledge as we discern a common life that celebrates the differences, as well as the places of deep sharing.

## TIME OF SILENCE

## HYMN/ SONG

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Holy and loving God

We pray today for all people. We give thanks especially for the many First Peoples across this country. We come to you in prayer now as we ask for wisdom and strength to join together to create more peaceful and just world.

We pray for our leaders. That they will have wisdom and courage to lead change that benefits all people, not just a few. That they will be able to collaborate across political divisions and work to create a better future for all of us together.

## DAY OF MOURNING 2026 RESOURCE

We pray for young people. We ask for joy, creativity and compassion for them. We pray that they will use their energy wisely as they follow you and try new ways of being people of God together. We pray that they will be discerning in how they move forward – to honour our country's shared history - to hold onto learnings that are helpful and leave behind generational wounds of pain and outdated ways of thinking. We pray that they will grow in faith as they learn to trust in you, and follow in the way of Jesus.

We pray for those who suffer. Where there are old hurts, may there be peace and healing. Where there are physical aches and pains, may they find comfort. For those who have been unjustly treated, may they find your grace, and may they find connection with people who speak life and hope, and can demonstrate what your justice for all people is like.

God we thank you for all the different gifts and skills you give to your diverse people. Help us to work together to use them for the good of all people and all creation.

We take a moment now to pray for those in our families and communities who are on our hearts and who need your grace, love and mercy:

(Pause here for community prayer)

For all these things we pray, gracious and loving God, in the name of the One who loves us, who became one of us, that we might have life in all its fullness - your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

## COMMISSION:

Jesus calls to us to come and follow him, so let us follow.  
On the way let us be light bearers for each other,  
Mindful of the shadows of our past, so that we do not get stuck there,  
Lighting the way for new possibilities of justice and peace,  
As we learn to walk gently and respectfully on this land together.

## BENEDICTION:

May God, who created and sustains these ancient lands and waterways also sustain you  
May Christ light your way as you follow him  
And the Holy Spirit keep you on the path of justice and peace.  
Go in peace, to love and to serve. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Isaiah 9:1-4 Psalm 27:1, 4-9 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 Matthew 4:12-23

## **A Poem (which can be sung) for the Children of our Communities of Faith**

My heart beats in time with the love of Jesus,  
My feet walk the paths to all I can be,  
When I cry tears of pain, I can call out his name,  
Because I know he will hear and bring comfort to me.

My heart beats in time with the love of Jesus,  
My hands clap in rhythm of my Country  
When I feel all alone, I can call out his name,  
Because I know he will hear and be a friend to me.

My heart beats in time with the love of Jesus,  
My ears hear stories of God's love for me  
I'm filled with Christ's light that lives inside me  
And shines out brightly for all to see.

*Authored by Kym Korbe, UAICC member and proud Guwa Koa, Kuku Yalanji woman.  
Children of our communities of faith are encouraged to create their own rhythms to sing these words, as part of a song for their place.*

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