

UNITING IN PRAYER 2024

19 May - 22 June

Facillitators Guide

A guide to help shape a Uniting in Prayer Service



**UNITING CHURCH
IN AUSTRALIA**



Uniting in Prayer: prayer and worship services

Facilitators Guide

Welcome to this facilitator's guide to planning and hosting a Uniting in Prayer service or event.

Between Pentecost and the Uniting Church Anniversary this year (19 May – 22 June 2024), the national Uniting Church is invited to hold the life of the Uniting Church before God in prayer across 35 days. During this time, we will give thanks to God for God's constant faithfulness to our Church, reflect on our present, and wait attentively upon the Spirit's call for our future.

We are delighted that you and your community will join with others in the Uniting Church in making this national time of prayer in your personal or shared worship.

The Assembly Transforming Worship Circle has prepared a full liturgy to help you hold a worship service during Uniting in Prayer, along with a suite of additional resources. These include many additional prayers, Bible reading suggestions, song suggestions and creative and intergenerational activities and ideas. There are intentionally more resources provided than you will be able to use. They are designed to be used flexibly and we encourage you to draw on them in any combination and context that makes sense in your community.

Here are some ways you and your community might take part in Uniting in Prayer:

- in a dedicated service of worship, using the provided Uniting in Prayer liturgy or parts of it, or your own!
- Incorporating Uniting in Prayer into a regular service of worship, such as:
 - praying for the Uniting Church in the Prayers of the People
 - inviting people, including kids, to write prayers as part of a children's time or time of reflection
 - drawing on one of the provided theological reflections in your preaching or in a small group
- by gathering for a time of prayer with others in your community or region, using any of the prayer and worship elements provided, or none. Depending on your context, this could be a larger gathering, or simply 'two or three gathered'.
- by writing your own prayer for the Uniting Church. This could be done as part of worship or as a personal spiritual practice. If you [send it to us](#), and with permission, we would love to share it widely.

Gathering for Prayer and Prayerful Gathering

As we gather in this time of Uniting in Prayer, there are ways that we can mark the importance of being a special community which is the Body of Christ. We are not only the Body of Christ in our place or context, but are also part of the Body of Christ which is the Uniting Church in Australia, as well as all of God's people, the holy, catholic and apostolic church throughout the world. As part of this event or service we are uniting in prayer in our community, both local, regional and across the nation.

Introduce this Uniting in Prayer Service or Event

It is important for this service or event that part of welcoming people introduces the aim and purpose of the gathering. You could draw on the invitation video from President Rev Sharon Hollis, or the introduction found at the top of the Uniting in Prayer liturgy.

If the space has been changed or rearranged for the service or event, it is good to share with people why things look and feel different. Though this may bring discomfort, invite people to participate as they feel able and to perhaps embrace the unusual for this gathering. Find more information below in this guide on preparing or changing your worship space.

Hosting an open time of prayer

Having a time of open or spontaneous prayer either as its own event, or part of worship, is a great way of allowing people to bring their own voice to our shared prayer for the Church and our future. But, this practice may be a bit unfamiliar to some of us. Depending on your context, and especially if you are inviting people to pray out loud, you may need to introduce what will happen in this time to create an environment where people feel empowered to participate. Some things that could be used to reassure people:

- Don't feel concerned about silence. It does not need to be filled. Take the time you need to become prepared to share what is on your heart. Slow down and give space so the Spirit can move
- Some people will feel most comfortable praying silently and should be reassured that this is fine and a valid participation
- It's ok to keep it short – gaps or moments of silence even while speaking are fine
- If you feel nervous about sharing, focus on and pray for just one thing
- Prayer is not a performance and does not need to be eloquent or scripted
- Authenticity is key! Just be you and pray in your own voice

When planning a Uniting in Prayer worship service or event, you may like to:

Invite others to be part of the planning, preparation and leadership

This could include:

- convening a group of people to prepare and/or lead the service
- inviting people to write prayers for the service or for use in your community, including in other languages if other languages are used
- inviting people to lead prayer/read prepared prayers
- inviting people to prepare or lead creative/interactive elements as part of worship

Set up the space differently than usual

Making changes to your worship space for a Uniting in Prayer service or event may create an enhanced sense of community, or make space for creative/intergenerational activities that may be used. It also signals that this service has a particular focus and is something unique. See a suite of ideas for setting up your space on pages 3-4.

Consult Uniting in Worship II

In addition to the liturgy and resources provided by the Assembly Transforming Worship Circle and Act2 Project Unit, UIW2 is another helpful resource in developing a worship or prayer service. This is especially if you plan to have Communion as part of the service or are looking for further prayers in our faith tradition.

Invite another Uniting Church congregation or community to share in worship with you

You might like to share in a Uniting in Prayer service or worship or time of prayer with others Uniting Church communities in your region. This could be in person, or online, for example in rural or regional areas where communities may be more dispersed. Reach out to ministers or community leaders in your area and see what collaboration may be possible as we share together our hopes for our future.

Invite people from other denominations to be involved

Given the Uniting Church's ethos and commitment to dialogue with other denominations, it may be appropriate to invite people and leaders from other local churches to be a part of your service or event. If they will be present, it may be helpful to frame the event more broadly in terms of praying for the life and witness of the Christian church in your region, and people from each denomination may like to pray for the other.

Setting up the space for a Uniting in Prayer service or event

1. **Consider your context and your people.** The aim of this service or event is to encourage people to unite in prayer, so consider how much change will be appropriate to help people participate while indicating the uniqueness of this event.
2. **Don't plan more than you are able to reasonably do.** Putting effort into a couple of special elements may be more effective than giving overboard with creativity. Try to use what is at hand or what you can gather or borrow. Allow for more than enough time for your preparation.
3. Whatever you are planning, it is advisable to **seek the approval of key leaders** such as the minister, council of elders or church council.
4. **Introduce people into any change and explain the reason for changing the space that they might be used to.** Welcome people into the space and point out some of the differences and the reasons for the change. As this is a service or event to unite people in prayer, it is good to help people access the meaning and purpose of any creative changes to the space.

The following are some ideas about how you might be able to creatively set the space for your Uniting in Prayer service/event.

Simple Focus

On a table at the front of the space or on the communion table if you are using the worship space you might set up a simple focus. This could be a special bunch of different kinds of flowers which represent diversity, an image or an icon, meaningful symbols, use of cloths, or a special candle or candle holder.

Rearranging the Seating

You might consider rearranging the seating if that is possible, with consideration of your context and people. In line with the aims of Uniting in Prayer, to connect and build unity and community, seating that allows people to better see each other might help foster a sense of connectedness. Some discomfort with change to the space is appropriate, as we are seeking to engage in prayer together with God who is the great unsettler and disturber.

Cultural Elements

What culture/s are represented in your congregation or group? How might you set the space so that those cultures are honoured? If you have more than one cultural group represented, how might you set out the space to weave the representation of those cultures in a way which symbolises that we are uniting in prayer?

Decoration

You might like to consider how you might decorate the space. What elements might contribute to or symbolise the notion of Uniting in Prayer. Things like lengths of different coloured cloth which come together at the front, maybe a banner or even, if you are using a screen, what images or backgrounds you choose might help to set a special atmosphere.

Including a Welcome to Country / Acknowledgement of Country

The Uniting Church Assembly encourages congregations, schools, agencies and governing bodies to ensure a Welcome to Country by First Peoples, or an Acknowledgement of First Peoples is given at the commencement of all gatherings and acts of worship. In this we honour our covenant relationship at the heart of our Church (1994), the Revised Preamble to the Constitution (2009) and our affirmation of First Nation Peoples as sovereign (2018). [Find out more about the history](#). For more information and guidance, [download the 'Acknowledgement of First Peoples' guide](#).

You may like to invite a First Nations Elder to welcome people to Country as part of the service/event. Only an Elder can do this. This would need to be arranged with the local mob with explanation about what the service/event was about and the Uniting Church's commitment to reconciliation if the person or people were not part of the UCA.

If offering an Acknowledgement of Country,

- Weave in some tie to the reason for gathering. In this case, something such as, "As we gather as part of our Church's Uniting in Prayer, we unite together and acknowledge the Country we are in and the people who have been custodians of it for tens of thousands of years."
- Name the people of this land/country specifically
- Recognise the sovereignty of the People, as the Uniting Church has resolved to do

Making our worship welcoming and accessible

Much of this resource is structured around the pattern of the Service of the Lord's Day. This is a good and helpful thing but we should be mindful of diversity. We are at our best when all people are not only accepted and welcome in words, but also in deeds, which includes the way we shape our gathering and events. The standard format of a service we might be used to or which is the norm in our congregation may not always cater for people with diverse needs or backgrounds. Here's some tips:

Explain Things

We should not assume everyone knows what to do and say, such as with common responses to such call and response liturgical elements. Explaining what is being done, how it will be done and why we do it can better enable people to participate.

Uniting in Prayer Together Doesn't Mean Everything All Together All at Once

Uniting in prayer does not necessarily mean that everyone must be doing the same thing all at once in the same way. We can be united in prayer through common purpose, for example in a range of activities, where all are equally uniting in prayer but just not in unison. Don't be afraid to use concurrent activities in different spaces, for example.

Neurodivergent People

Your congregation may be aware and accommodating of people who are neurologically diverse and may be able to use this resource to find things that will be helpful and work with your people. Neurodivergent people, like all people, may experience faith and connection with God in different ways. Talking with people and understanding how they best connect with God and with the community can help us create a space and event/service where all can truly be uniting in prayer. When we share our needs with each other, then we can work together to create helpful experiences for all.

Different Abilities

To help people with different abilities participate we may need to make some adjustments for the way we present things or organise things. People can truly unite in prayer when they feel truly accepted and welcome. For people with mobility needs, there may need to be space created so that they can fully participate, or less movement included. For people with visual impairment, things might need to be read or there may need to be large print versions of printed material. Hearing impaired people may need audio channelled properly or for audio elements to be written or subtitled.

Different Ages and Stages

In our congregations we have people at different ages, different stages of faith development and different stages of life. Knowing for and catering for difference can be helpful in creating a welcoming and engaging Uniting in Prayer service/event. There are intergenerational suggestions offered in this resource. Interactive and collaborative activities are a simple way of catering across ages and stages as they allow people to join together as they are able, whilst at the same time building connections across generations and fostering stronger relationships. Where relevant, we recommend including people from a range of ages and stages in preparation and leadership.

Different Cultures

We are a truly multicultural church. Even in congregations which might not have different ethnic cultures represented there will be cultural differences across families and other groups. As mentioned above, even if your congregation doesn't have different languages spoken by members, the inclusion of prayer or content which is in different languages reminds us that we are not just uniting in prayer as a congregation, but as the whole Uniting Church in Australia, which is very much a multicultural Church.