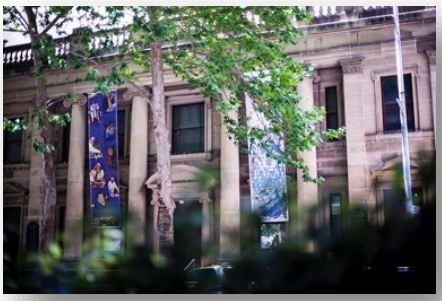
Pitt Street Uniting Church
A Congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia
Founded 1833



Sunday Gathering

11 January 2026

BAPTISM OF JESUS

Baptism of Jesus by He Qi

Welcome to Pitt Street Uniting Church

This is a place of welcome for all people regardless of race, sex, creed, age, cultural backgrounds, sexuality, gender identity or intersex status. Wherever you are on your journey, where you have come from and wherever you are going to, whatever you believe, whatever you do not believe, you are welcome here.

All we ask for is mutual respect.

Please join in the congregational responses printed in **bold**. We will sing hymns without announcement. Stand if you are able, but feel free to remain seated if that is more comfortable for you.

A quiet activity area is available at the north side of the church for young children.

MUSICAL PRELUDE

Please stand as you are able.

We gather as people of God

PROCESSIONAL HYMN Praise with joy the world's Creator
TiS 179

Praise with joy the world's creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
source and end of human knowledge,
force of greatness, without cease.
Celebrate the maker's glory,
power to rescue and release.

Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,
frees the captive, finds the lost,
heals the sick, upsets religion,
fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence –
Friend and Stranger, Guest and host.

Praise the Spirit sent among us,
liberating truth from pride,
forging bonds where race or gender,
age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure –
foolishness none dare deride.

Please remain standing as you are able.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional owners of this land,
and we recognise that this land is sacred land.
That this land is Holy ground.
We honour the Gadigal of the Eora nation
and pay our respects as we gather to worship God.

GATHERING

Come into this place
which we make holy through the community of love.
Come into this place
where the ordinary is sanctified,
the human is celebrated,
the compassionate is expected.
Let us celebrate the richness and diversity of life
in the presence we name God.

HYMN Praise with joy the world's Creator
TiS 179

Praise the Maker, Son and Spirit,
One God in community,
calling Christians to embody
oneness and diversity.
This the world shall yet believe, when
shown Christ's vibrant unity.

Please be seated.

WELCOME

OPENING RESPONSES

The skies are open above us
and the grace of God pours forth in blessing.
We stand with Jesus the Christ
and we know a love which is more
than we could imagine.
Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
God's Spirit lightly touches us.
Before we even know it, it is offered.
The love of God is boundless.
It frees and liberates every human heart
which will receive it.

PRAYER OF AWARENESS

As we gather together in this sacred time
in this new year
let us also recognise that we gather
in the presence of Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Let us reflect on who we are and who we are becoming
in the presence of one another and the God who is with us.

We take a moment to give thanks for another day;
to give thanks for all those in our lives
who have brought us warmth and love;
to give thanks for the gift of life.

Let us open ourselves to the process
of becoming more whole:
of living more fully
of understanding more completely
the meaning of our lives here on this earth.

A time of silence

In this New Year, Holy One,
bless us with a sharpened awareness of your presence
to see you in everything …

Bless us with a desire to praise you in song and poetry
and to see you in everything …

Bless us with deep compassion
and a willingness to see you in everything …
Amen.

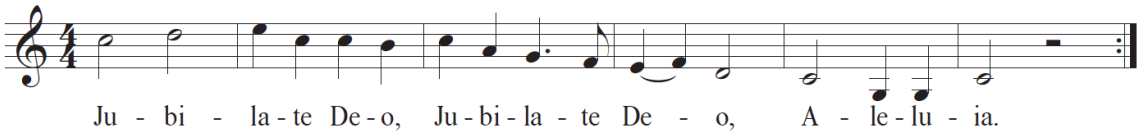
WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The old year has come and gone.
The new year is here.
All that has been, has been.
Let go of what was done and what was not done.
In God's love, each year, each day, each moment
offers new possibilities.
We are forgiven and free, to live and love again.
Thanks be to God.

Please stand to sing as you are able.

JUBILATE DEO (TAIZÉ)

sung three times



SHARING A SIGN OF PEACE

May the peace of God be with you now and always!
And also with you!

We are invited to greet those around us,
sharing a sign of peace.

We listen for God's Word

THE WORD IN TEXTS

Hebrew Bible: Isaiah 42:1-9

For the ancient promises of Divine Presence.
We give thanks.

New Testament: Acts 10:34-43

For stories of encouragement and witness.
We give thanks

HYMN Community of Christ
TiS 473

Community of Christ,
who make the cross your own,
live out your creed and risk your life
for God alone:
the God who wears your face,
to whom all worlds belong,
whose children are of every race
and every song.

Community of Christ,
look past the Church's door
and see the refugee, the hungry, and the poor.
Take hands with the oppressed,
the jobless in your street,
take towel and water, that you wash
your neighbour's feet.

Community of Christ,
through whom the word must sound –
cry out for justice and for peace
the whole world round:
disarm the powers that war
and all that can destroy,
turn bombs to bread, and tears of anguish
into joy.

When menace melts away,
so shall God's will be done,
the climate of the world be peace
and Christ its sun;
our currency be love
and kindliness our law,
our food and faith be shared as one
for evermore.

Please be seated.

READING

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-17

For the Word that was in the beginning,
for the Word that invites and inspires,
for the Word embodied in us.
We give thanks.

REFLECTION Rev Lindsay Cullen

We respond in love

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND SOLIDARITY

Let us pray in thanksgiving and solidarity:

At the beginning of his ministry,
Jesus heard himself named as the beloved.
Before he had begun to teach and lead and heal,
Jesus knew that God loved him and was pleased with him.
Loving, God, we give thanks for this reminder of your generous, never-ceasing love for all of your creation.

We know that everything came into being in goodness.
Every creature on the face of the earth is a part of this good, loving and joyful creating.
We are your people! We belong together!
We are, all of us, the community of God.
For this we give you thanks.

Today we pray for people who do not experience the grace of being accepted and loved just for who they are.
We pray for those who must pretend
to be what they are not in order to be acceptable.

We remember places where people struggle through lack of food.
We remember places where people suffer from violence and oppression.

We pray for a different world, embodied by Jesus at his baptism:
the world of unconditional love, of welcome,
of your pleasure and delight in a human being
simply for the miracle of their life.

Silence

Please offer your prayers in silence or if online, please use the chat facility.

These are the prayers of our hearts.
In your many names, we pray.
Amen.

JESUS PRAYER

In the spirit of Jesus, in these words, or in those of our own language or tradition, we gather together all our prayers:

God, you are life for us,
holy be your name.
Your new day come, your will be done,
on earth as in your vision.
Give us this day our bread for the morrow;
and forgive us our wrongs,
as we forgive those who wrong against us.
Strengthen us in the time of test,
and deliver us from evil.
For the power and the splendour
and fulfilment are yours
now and forever. Amen.

OFFERING

We share our offering
as a symbol of our commitment to God,
and the world God loves.

BANK DETAILS FOR ELECTRONIC OFFERING
Account name: Giving Direct
BSB: 634-634. Account: 100025916
Reference: your name
Contact the Church Office if you would like information about planned giving.

Please stand, as you are able, as the offering is carried forward.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

We pray together:

We dedicate our lives, and these gifts,
to the hope that calls us
towards peace, joy and love.
Amen.

Please remain standing as you are able.

HYMN We are your people
TiS 468

We are your people;
Spirit of grace,
you dare to make us to all our neighbours,
Christ's living voice, hands, and face.

Joined in community,
treasured and fed,
may we discover gifts in each other,
willing to lead and be led.

Rich in diversity,
help us to live
closer than neighbours, open to strangers,
able to clash and forgive.

Glad of tradition,
help us to see
in all life's changing, where you are leading,
where our best efforts should be.

Give, as we venture
justice and care
(peaceful, resisting, waiting or risking)
wisdom to know when and where.

Christ as we serve you
in different ways,
may all we're doing
show that you're living,
meeting your love with our praise.

Please remain standing as you are able.

SENDING OUT

Let us go from here transformed.
We are called to be the people of God.
Walking peacefully and with faith.
Go into this week with deep assurance and hope.

BLESSING

May God's love guide us;
Christ's teaching inspire us,
and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit be with us.
May we know the deep peace of God as we go.

SUNG AMEN African American

Please be seated.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUNG BLESSING Words: Julie Perrin; Music: Robin Mann

For you, deep stillness of the silent inland
For you, deep blue of the desert skies
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones
For you, sweet water from hidden springs.
From the edges seek the heartlands
and when you're burnt by the journey
may the cool winds of the hovering
Spirit soothe and replenish you.
In the name of Christ, in the name of Christ.

MUSICAL POSTLUDE Peter Bennett

Everyone onsite is welcome to stay for morning tea and coffee, and all on Zoom are invited to stay on for community time together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The words for this liturgy were adapted from previous Pitt Street liturgies (2017, 2020, and 2023)
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Resources for after Church meeting on Sunday 18 January in preparation for the Day of Mourning

Redefining the 'Aboriginal Problem'

From “Neoliberal Indigenous Policy” by Elizabeth Strakosch

Social liberal logics informed the official Australian policy of 'self-determination'. From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, federal governments acted to establish progressive systems of self-management and legislative recognition Gull 2004; Stokes and Juli 2000; Murphy 2000; Gibson 1999). The centre piece of this policy regime was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). ATSIC operated through an elected regional council structure and was thus positioned as an authentic Indigenous political voice (Murphy 2000). The self-determination approach overlapped with and supported a social 'recon-ciliation' agenda, whereby the state aimed to reform mainstream attitudes and address past injustices (Gunstone 2007; Gooder and Jacobs 2002). Within the self-determination/reconciliation framework, Indigenous peoples were positioned as disadvantaged through collective historical exclusion but deserving of full inclusion in the

Australian nation-state. It was the responsibility of mainstream governments to enact this inclusion through legislation, social welfare and support for limited forms of autonomy (Gibson 1999).

In Australian Indigenous policy, neoliberalism arrived relatively late. Other areas of Australian social policy and the public sector were trans-formed by the late 1990s, and a great deal of critical academic debate around neoliberalism took place at this time (see, for example, Davis et al. 1997; Carney et al. 2001). However, it was not until the second and third terms of the conservative Howard government (2001-2007) that neoliberal arguments about inefficiency, the unsustainability of welfare and Aboriginal passivity began to have a concrete effect on Indigenous policy. From 2001 to 2004, these ideas were deployed in an intensive way to justify the dismantling of the previous structures of Indigenous self-management and reconciliation.

This chapter explores this discursive shift from social liberal to neoliberal framings of Indigenous issues. It suggests that the social liberal· approach, evident in the reconciliation and representation agenda, frames the Indigenous 'problem' as one of continued exclusion - the process of bringing Indigenous people into citizenship regimes and the life of the nation-state has not been fully completed. In contesting and transforming this agenda, the federal government led by Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) repositions Indigenous people as already included and politically equivalent to other Australians. The problem then becomes the statistical, socio-economic disadvantage that does mark them out as different, and which needs to be addressed to create full sameness. Neoliberal Indigenous policy discourses, there-fore, move away from the previous focus on political relationships to foreground Indigenous social and economic 'deficiencies'. This leads to an increasing policy preoccupation with Indigenous subjectivities (for example, as 'welfare-dependent'); as Walter argues, in neoliberalism 'those marginalised by the market economy become "social problems" external to the system, and

the solution to those problems is deemed to lie in the reform of the individual who constitutes the problem' (Walter 2007: 162).

More broadly, this new language of policy reframes dominant under-standings of the nature of colonialism and the possible pathways towards political change. Where socio-economic differences were previously seen as arising from political issues, including insufficient inclusion, in neoliberal logics it is the socio-economic differences which create and exhaust political difference between Indigenous and other Australians. In the name of redressing this disadvantage, any rearrangement in Indigenous governance, representation and interaction with non-Indigenous people is justified. Inclusion is already presumed but is complicated by the presence of disadvantage and by organisations such as ATSIC that create 'false' political division. In fact, according to government rhetoric, such organisations have contributed to disadvantage by creating dependent and politicised subjectivities, distorting the natural harmony between the state and Indigenous people. Representation and political encounter become framed as part of the problem - and when removed will allow 'organic', practical communication between Indigenous communities and governments to address disadvantage. Neoliberal logics, therefore, lead to a more intense focus on Indigenous life, behaviour and sociality than on the space of relationship with settlers.

… These destinies will be managed through a single foundational act of agreement - a social contract - between the government and its Indigenous citizens. These acts of agreement will be the mechanism by which Indigenous people will access discretionary monies to pay for being improved; to have our capacity developed; through extended periods of discipline and accountability, before we can sensibly be left to manage our own, and our family affairs

This is the primary role of the two new policy implementation instruments: the SRA and the RPA. (Arabena 2005: 27-28)
The chapter is based on an in-depth analysis of the program logic of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). These agreements became the flagship federal Indigenous policy in Australia after the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). They emerged from the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trials that started prior to the end of ATSIC, and agreements made during the trials were incorporated into the new federal policy. In SRAs, governments entered into mutual obligation-type pacts with individual communities. These agreements aimed to distribute the pool of Indigenous-specific discretionary funding previously allocated by ATSIC. In return, communities committed to specific behavioural changes that were connected to the project, such as ensuring only the children who attended school used new pool facilities (FaSCIA 2006b).

The concept of 'governance capacity' was woven through SRA program logic and used to gesture towards a vague Indigenous deficiency. SRAs took the newly urgent issue' of Indigenous material disadvantage and framed this as a 'wicked policy problem' that could only be solved with the help of the Aboriginal subject (Australian Public Service Commission 2007: 2; Hunt 2007: 155). The focus of policy work became Indigenous governance capacity development as a prerequisite of achieving material equality. However, this capacity was not denied, but simultaneously acknowledged by and made to exist through the policy process. In the neoliberal quasi-contractualism discussed here, sovereign inclusion) was not withheld) until Indigenous liberal governmental capacity was achieved. Rather, provisional recognition of capacity was extended in order to justify the policy and allow Indigenous communities to sign the agreement. In return for this recognition, Indigenous groups would be required to develop their governance capacities and alter their behaviour in a process of 'normalisation'. Subjectivity was (re)opened as a site of legitimate government intervention - Indigenous desires, motivations and 'ownership' of

policy agenda became sites of reform. Therefore, rather than excluding Indigenous people, neoliberal SRAs positioned them in a more complex position of 'excluded inclusion' and governmental 'incapable capacity' (Brigg 201J7). This is the flickering borderline, subject position that is the true innovation of neoliberal policy and that allows swift movements in either direction - towards an always temporary recognition performed capacity free from governmental reform of subjectivities, or into an equally temporary state of enforced tutelage. Indeed, such as assessments and governmental reallocations were internal to the program logic, which put forward different strategies for signing agreements with different types of communities, including those exhibiting developed Indigenous governance' and communities.

Critically, I suggest that this governance capacity was framed as including willingness to cooperate with governments to address disadvantage. This means that, while SRAs retained the overall aim of changing concrete Indigenous living conditions, their implementation was focused on leveraging Indigenous participation with governments in the project of fully governing Indigenous lives. Effectively, Indigenous political consent to settler authority was subsumed within the neutralised governmental notion of governance capacity. This conceptual link between SRA signing and Indigenous capacity points to a central manoeuvre of the neoliberal program logic: the construction of Indigenous consent as an essential element of Indigenous governance capacity, and hence of the policy project to redress disadvantage. This reflects the ongoing practice in which colonising authorities declare Indigenous people to be fully consenting members of the settler nation-state, and work to extract and construct this consent in everyday interaction.

Therefore, I suggest that this neoliberal policy program aimed to generate sovereign as well as governmental effects. The neoliberal deployment of capacity sought to bring the Indigenous policy subject more fully into diverse governmental regimes *and* into sovereign relations with a centralised projected state. It did this by subsuming Indigenous sovereign consent to settler rule within the governmental concept of Indigenous capacity building and pursuing the first in the name of the second. This is an intensification, and contemporary reworking, of long-term colonial attempts to reform Indigenous subjectivities in line with settler political interests.

This chapter begins with a more detailed discussion of the centrally important question of 'capacity' in colonial and neoliberal logics. SRAs, in assessing and transforming this capacity, built on a much longer settler liberal tradition. The chapter then unpicks the program logic of …