

finding meaning in the cross

The artist Uncle Colin Isaacs encourages us to value the cross as a gift to honour those who have gone before us, to appreciate Aboriginal culture more deeply, and to work for justice and healing for all. It is thus an active sign of Reconciliation. The two arms of the cross represent, respectively, the deep culture of this land and its various peoples. On the vertical arm of the cross, the warrior stands for Multuggerah but also for all Aboriginal warriors and Aboriginal people of strength, wisdom and courage, who love their land and people and its Spirit. The snake represents the Spirit moving in creation, underpinning everything. The horizontal arm represents European settler culture, much less deep in Australia yet still real and vital, with genuine and growing relationship to the land. At the heart of the cross is One Tree Hill/Table Top Mountain, which, together with the birds of peace is a source of unity in our shared land. Indeed, alternatively or in addition, we might even see the Aboriginal figure as a Christ figure, offering us strength and healing. The tree at the heart of the cross can also remind us of the tree of life and the tree of reconciliation on Calvary. The bird can remind us of the Holy Spirit. The flags, like the two arms, represent all our different peoples, yet brought together in one.

A Prayer for Healing and Reconciliation

Lord God, bring us together as one,
reconciled with you and reconciled with each other.
You made us in our likeness,
you gave us your Son, Jesus Christ.
He has given us forgiveness from sin.
Lord God, bring us together as one,
different in culture, but given new life in Jesus Christ,
together as your body, your Church, your people.
Lord God, bring us together as one,
reconciled, healed, forgiven,
sharing you with others as you have called us to do.
In Jesus Christ, let us be together as one. Amen.

*from A Prayer Book for Australia, copyright The Anglican Church of Australia
under the imprint Broughton Books, used by permission*

RECONCILIATION CROSS



honouring our shared history and encouraging the next
steps in our Reconciliation journey together

A step in Reconciliation

On November 14 2016, history was both made and recognised, with the installation of a memorial cross, together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, in the Warriors Chapel of St Luke's Anglican Church in Toowoomba. The cross, created by renowned Aboriginal artist Uncle Colin Isaacs, commemorates the Battle of One Tree Hill (now best known as Table Top Mountain), the best known of a series of conflicts between European settlers and Aboriginal inhabitants of the Darling Downs, led by the great warrior Multuggerah, in the 1840s.

A gift for a generous people

The Warriors Chapel in St Luke's Church is a dedicated space to honour all those who have died and otherwise suffered in conflict. It is a space which in that sense belongs to all our community, not simply to some and certainly not to the Christian Church, never mind Anglicans, alone. It is designated as a holy place, to hold the deepest hurts and hopes of our lives, communities and wider world. It is designated as a place for prayer, reflection and attention. That is one reason we seek to keep St Luke's open every day, usually from about 8 am until mid or late afternoon, so that anyone can come, to rejoice or let down some of their burdens, to remember and be refreshed, to honour what has been and to discover fresh strength for the future. The Battle of One Tree Hill cross is therefore part of this essential purpose of St Luke's and it is intended for all in our wide, diverse and growing community.

A way of acknowledging pain and finding healing

The memorial cross helps us face up to a tragic and troubled reality in our past. Whilst we may rejoice at the fruitfulness of so much of our lives together, the full story of how we have come to be as we are needs to be fully acknowledged so that we may heal, restore what we can, and become stronger together. So the most important thing about the cross is honouring all those who suffered in the past, who were killed or injured, dispossessed or crushed in body, mind and spirit by the conflict highlighted by the Battle of One Tree Hill. For a cross is a reminder of pain and death, and destruction of various kinds. Yet a cross is also a symbol of love and of assurance that true life can never be defeated. It also affirms the courage and commitment of all those who have called this land their own, seeking fuller justice, peace and enjoyment for us all.

The cross as a Christian symbol

Sometimes Christians have not always properly appreciated the cross as a central symbol of our faith. Indeed at times the cross has, as it were, been turned upside down and made into a sword, to hurt, oppress, and destroy others. This memorial cross therefore helps acknowledge that failing as part of the need for Christian sorry business. For the cross for Christians is above all a symbol of love: a symbol of a perfect offering of love to bear the world's pain, reconcile and transform it into new life for all.

A gift of mutual love

The gift of the memorial cross was arranged by Heather Johnston, a descendant of one of the original settlers of Multuggerah's time. From the Aboriginal side, it is also another creation of the remarkable artist Uncle Colin Isaacs: a member of the Dharawal people on his mother's side and the Noongar people on his father's side, and now also part of the extended family of the Ngarabal people. A highly impressive and prolific artist, Uncle Colin portrays his own unique interpretation of Aboriginal Culture on canvas, elaborate woodburnings, high quality artifacts, textile and pottery design and his art has been purchased by private collectors from Holland, Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom, Cypress, Canada, United States of America, Japan and Australia. Perhaps he is best known however as the Myall Creek artist who created the imaging and art used along the memorial walkway of the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial Site. (find out more at <http://www.newagemultimedia.com/isaacs>)

Uncle Colin says the following about his art:

Art and cultural expression is important to the Aboriginal people. Very few Aboriginal artists, if any, have been trained as artists, in the normal perception of what an artist is by white society. The Elders have passed their knowledge, know how, methods, meaning and spiritual significance of creating these images onto others to continue with the tradition. These images are not created solely for the purpose of being art, for arts sake. These images are a form of communication. They convey relationships to the land, to the Dreaming, history, life experiences as well as modern ideology.

This is what this memorial cross is also about. It is not intended primarily as an artwork, or mere decoration, but as a means of communicating, building relationships, and deepening our understanding of the most important things in our lives. It expresses healing, hope and love for all.