Service of Induction of a Deacon in a Community Setting

A resource prepared by the Forest Advocacy Ministry Committee (FAMC), a committee of the Mid North Coast Presbytery

March 2024

https://www.unitingearthweb.org.au/forests/

About this resource

This resource is based on the service of induction of Forest Chaplain the Rev. Dr Jason John. The service took place at an outdoor gathering on the grounds of Gleniffer Church on Gumbaynggirr Country on February 18, 2024.

The Uniting Church Assembly has a standard Service of Induction of a Deacon, which is available from the Assembly resource site, https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au. However, FAMC found the standard service to be unsuitable for our context. The standard service assumes that all those gathered are Christians. As is the case for many deacon placements, the Forest Chaplain role serves not in a church congregation but in a wider community context. We therefore developed a modified service suitable for a broader gathering, which we offer through this resource for the consideration of others who are preparing for an induction in a community setting. The service presented here was 70 minutes long.

The Forest Chaplain role emerged out of the work of FAMC over several years to join with and support the efforts of those who defend the forests on the NSW north coast through advocacy, pastoral support and spiritual gatherings. The role is primarily funded by the Jan de Voogd Peace Fund, a bequest administered by the Quakers in NSW. The responsibilities of the role include:

- Provide confidential listening and debriefing to individuals actively engaged in defending the forests
- Participate in community forums
- Listen to and walk alongside First Nations groups and leaders and advocate for their sovereignty within the context of the local forests
- Contribute to broader Forest Advocacy Ministry
- Bring people together to explore faith, spirituality, and build resilience, joy and hope in the face of the emotional toll of forest campaigning
- Provide resources to support creation care in the Uniting Church and community

Furthermore, the placement is part of a bi-vocational ministry, with Jason also working as the coordinator of Bellinger Landcare. He has lived in the community in which he serves for approximately 15 years and has built many relationships over that time, within and beyond the church, including with forest defenders, First Nations people and others. It was therefore important to FAMC and Jason that the induction celebration include and involve people from the various communities whom the Forest Chaplain serves. We encourage inclusion in the induction service of those among or with whom the deacon will be ministering, whether a deacon is already living in the community or is moving into a new one.

The service that we developed aimed to recognise this diversity. It was also important that the service reflect the intent and ethos of the Forest Chaplain role, which includes recognition of First Nations sovereignty. In particular:

- The service included both an Acknowledgment of and Welcome to Country.
- There were two reflections, one by Gumbaynggirr leader Micklo Jarrett, and another by Rev. Phil Dokmanovic.
- The service used Christian language, forms and understandings, but it did not assume that everyone present shared or was familiar with these – e.g. it did not include a recitation of the Nicene Creed. Explanations were also included to make the significance of parts of the service clear.

- The service used a variety of forms of prayer/meditation, including a breathing meditation which was based on the experience of FAMC members of leading outdoor gatherings with people of various faiths and none.
- The presentation of symbols was done by eight individuals/groups, representing the different aspects of the Forest Chaplain role and the different communities with whom the chaplain works/serves. This was non-scripted, with each individual/group invited to speak briefly.

More than 40 people attended the induction, including Uniting Church members, forest defenders, Gumbaynggirr leaders, members of the non-denominational Gleniffer Church, participants in the Gleniffer Ecofaith Community (an outdoor gathering of people of various faiths/spiritualities), and Mid North Coast Quakers. There was local media coverage in newspapers and ABC local radio in the leadup to and following the induction.

Service outline

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Photos by Angela Lownie, John Brentnall, Phil Dokmanovic and Scout Lawson-John.

The Gathering of the People

Gathering
FAMC member (Miriam Pepper) announces for people to take seats.
Flute plays (Jessi Levy, student minister at Bellingen Uniting Church and member of FAMC).

Acknowledgment of Country
(Shared by Jessi Levy)
Giinagay! (“warm greetings”). We are gathering on the lands of the Gumbaynggirr people, to whom I pay my respect, and for whose love and care of this country for millennia I give honour and thanks. We have gathered to induct - that is, ceremonially launch, give our blessing, and communally welcome - Rev Jason John, into a community chaplaincy based here, in Gumbaynggirr, and stretching also into the lands of the Dunghutti and Bundjalung peoples.

Let us acknowledge our debt of respect to these and to all First Peoples of these lands, and honour to their elders past and current, and coming forth. It is the First Peoples who have known and honoured the Creator Spirit in these lands, “through law, custom and ceremony,” as the Uniting Church acknowledges - long “before the arrival of the colonisers.”

May we, second peoples, learn well, by listening well; that we may better walk together toward true justice and peace for all in these lands now called Australia.

My name is Jessi Levy, I'm Student Minister, honoured to be serving here in Gumbaynggirr as Pastor of Bellingen Uniting Church, and as member of the Forest Ministry Committee. And we are honoured to have Uncle Micklo Jarrett welcome us to and speak with us about his precious Gumbaynggirr home.

Jessi plays the flute

Welcome to Country
(Uncle Micklo Jarrett)

Breathing/grounding/connecting
(Jessi Levy)
Though we may forget or think otherwise: we are not in or visiting nature; we are nature. We, human beings, have the blessed "opportunity to add our praise, gratitude and testimony to the totality of everything that is, [like] placing seeds in soil into the flux and form of this nature." (Poet, Pattian Rogers)

So let's now both give and receive conscious breath and presence, here on this Gumbaynggirr part of Earth.

I'm going to invite you to stand - you might like to remove your shoes first, if you haven't already, so you can feel your skin connecting with that of Earth. Or you might sense that connection through whatever you're wearing on your feet.

As we stand, we might close our eyes.

Let's relax our bellies - ground of our breathing - and our shoulders, consciously receiving the big breath of air that we need. Breathing deeply. Our hands might go to our diaphragm or heart; we can cup them - as we breathe in - in gratitude that the trees around us are breathing out the oxygen that keeps us alive.

After the next in-breath, let's engage our bellies: pushing the used air out, all the way - conscious exhalation. Letting our hands express, as we deepen our breath, our praise that the carbon dioxide we breathe out is inhaled by the trees around us, as they live and grow.

Uncle Micklo welcomes the group

Our fingers dropping down, toward our feet: closing our eyes and feeling the live connection between us and the ground where we are being. Conscious that the molecules of which we are wonderfully made have also been the molecules of which this planet was made - humans from the humus of Earth - let's breathe through our toes, in and out, with thankfulness for and to this nurturing Earth.

The next in-breath, bringing hands up in front of our body, lifting our eyes and our hands to the skies - giving both humble and glorious testimony that these molecules of Earth were once the dust of stars … and the creating Love that gives them light is the same Love that animates us.A deep, open breath of connection. Let's hold that.

And, with a sigh, bring our hands down and our breath out. [sigh!]

Looking in front, beside, behind us: these beings - plants and humans, maybe animals - with whom we share connection.

Finally - bringing hands into whatever feels like prayer for you - beside, before, behind, between and within us, we sense, we know: the Ground of our Being Who breathes us, holds us, loves us into life. So we receive and return that love, with our breath, with our lives. Amen.

Breathing meditation

Context for the induction
(Miriam Pepper)
My name is Miriam. I am part of the Forest Advocacy Ministry and I live on Gadigal land. Thank you Uncle Micklo for your welcome.

We are gathered here to celebrate the induction of Jason into his role as Forest Chaplain. Today follows conversations over years about the need for greater support of those who defend the forests of Gumbaynggirr Country and beyond. Two years ago, the Forest Advocacy Ministry formed

as a group of Christians seeking to bring what we could to the struggle to end the destruction of the forests of the Mid North Coast. Over time, we came to see that offering care to forest defenders in the form of a chaplaincy was what we could especially offer.

Jason's role has been made possible by funding from the Jan de Voogd Peace Fund (a bequest administered by the Quakers in NSW) for the Koala Chaplaincy project and from the Uniting Church. (Acknowledge Mid North Coast Quakers, who are present.)

Jason's role is broad. He will offer a listening ear to forest defenders, advocate for the care of forests to reflect the unceded sovereignty of First Nations Peoples, bring people together to explore spirituality and build resilience in the context of forest campaigning, support the Gleniffer Church and Gleniffer Ecofaith Community, and more. Already in his role, Jason has connected with many of us in various ways. Thank you to all of you for being part of this special occasion.

Prayer of confession
(Miriam Pepper)
The prayer of confession, and the declaration of forgiveness that follows it, is an important part of the ritual of the church. It is a time for the gathered people to come before God as who we are, in acknowledgment of our strengths and our shortcomings, and experience the love of God.

And so we pray:

All is not well with the forests. Ecocidal forces beyond us, against our deepest wishes, destroy and degrade the forests and take the lives of countless creatures. As we confront this situation and seek daily to respond: Show us your compassion, God.

Miriam talks about the context for the induction

We are deeply impacted by the assaults on Mother Earth. Many of us bear wounds from her destruction and from defending her: Show us your compassion, God.

If we have not acted in love but have lashed out in hurt or hatred at others: Show us your compassion, God.

If we are paralysed by the enormity of it all: Show us your compassion, God.

Whether we are bursting with energy and enthusiasm, or tired and overwhelmed: Show us your compassion, God.

We hold a silence now for our own confessions ...

Declaration of forgiveness
(Miriam Pepper)
Hear then the good news:
God loves us and is with us in our struggles.
Thanks be to God.

(Miriam introduces that we will now have some readings, then reflections by Micklo and Phil.)

Gathering under the yew tree

The Service of the Word

Readings
1988 Statement to the Nation
(Jeff Kite, FAMC member)
We affirm our belief that the natural world is God's creation; good in God's eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life.
Recognising the vulnerability of the life and resources of creation, we will work to promote the responsible management, use and occupation of the earth by human societies.
We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation.

Genesis 2, adapted
(Hilary Kite, Gleniffer Ecofaith Community)
In the day that YHWH made the land and the sky, God formed the earthling from the Earth, the Adam from the Adamah.
God breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the earthling became a living being.
And YHWH planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the Adam whom he had formed.
Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
Then YHWH took the Adam and put it in the garden of Eden to serve it and protect it.

Rosemary Radford-Ruether
(Miriam Pepper)
We were not created to dominate and rule the earth, for it governed itself well and better for millions of years when we did not exist or existed as nondominant mammals… Stewardship is not a primal command, but the effort of dominant males to correct over abuse and become better managers of what they have assumed to be their right, namely, ownership of the rest of the world.

Hilary reads Genesis 2

(Source: Ecofeminism – The Challenge to Theology, p. 28, in Deportate Esuli Profughe https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n20/06_20_-Ruether_Ecofeminism.pdf)

Matthew 5:1-9
(Jessi Levy)
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Reflections
Uncle Micklo Jarrett shares the story of the White Fig Tree, the Tree of Life, which teaches us the importance of sharing together.

Gathering song in Gumbaynggirr language, Jaanymili ("gather now").

Rev. Phil Dokmanovic, FAMC member and minister at Bangalow-Byron Bay Uniting Church, shares a reflection on the "big story" of the natural order and the "little story" of the Christian scriptures. He closed with Jesus' affirmation that "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God".

For excerpts of these reflections, see https://www.insights.uca.org.au/jason-john-inducted-as-forest-chaplain/

Phil shares a reflection

The Service of Induction

Introduction
(Rev. Jo Smalbil, Deputy Chairperson, Mid North Coast Presbytery)

An Induction Service is intended to mark and celebrate the commencement of a new ministry.

It is a joyful occasion that recognises Ministry as a calling: In the Uniting Church, we believe that God calls individuals to ministry, and that the mind of Christ is revealed through His people – the Body of Christ.

The service will include an opportunity for Jason to share how he sensed God's guidance in undertaking this ministry, and will invite those Christians present to re-affirm their commitment to Christ and His Gospel, as well as their commitment to one another in ministry with forest defenders, other members of the Uniting Church, Gleniffer Church and Gleniffer Ecofaith Community, and people from other faith groups in this area.

Jason will be supported by, and accountable to, the Mid-North Coast Presbytery and this community.

Jo and Jason

Announce intention to induct the deacon
(Jo Smalbil)
The Presbytery of MNC has resolved to induct Jason to serve as a deacon, as a forest chaplain in this region Jason, we rejoice that God has called you by the voice of the Church to serve Jesus Christ in this placement and presbytery.

I welcome you all to this joyful occasion!

Questions to the deacon

(The deputy chairperson addresses the deacon:)

Jason, as we walk together on Christ's Way, you are called to be a forest chaplain in this region. It is your task to:

- Provide confidential listening and debriefing to individuals actively engaged in defending the forests
- Participate in Community Forums.
- Listen to and walk alongside First Nations groups and leaders and advocate for their sovereignty within the context of the local forests
- Contribute to broader Forest Advocacy Ministry.
- Bring people together to explore faith, spirituality, and build resilience, joy and hope in the face of the emotional toll of forest campaigning.
- Provide resources to support creation care in the Uniting Church and community.

In view of this solemn trust, I ask you to reaffirm the declaration of faith and obedience that you made at your ordination and to show that you desire, by God's grace, to continue your ministry in this chaplaincy.

Do you confess anew Jesus Christ as Lord? *I do.*

Do you embrace the faith and unity of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, as set forth in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, expressed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and described in the Basis of Union, including the *inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries? *I do.*

Do you accept the discipline of the Uniting Church and the oversight of this presbytery? *I do.*

*We added this phrase from the Basis to show guests that we are science-affirming and not a "literalist" church.

Jason responds

Do you affirm and commit yourself to the covenant made between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Uniting Church*? *I do.*

Will you take part in the work of this presbytery and other councils of the Uniting Church, and will you share in the life and witness of the wider Church? *I will.*

Presentation of symbols
(Jo Smalbil and community members)
This chaplaincy involves many tasks, some of which we will symbolise this afternoon to remind Jason of his responsibilities.

Each person is invited to say a few words as they hand Jason the symbols (1-2 sentences). Symbols will be placed on the altar.

- A caring, listening ear for individuals and at gatherings [A forest defender presents a cup of tea/coffee – "a simple answer to every problem", and tea-towel].
- Continuing to listen to First Nations groups and leaders and respond in concrete ways [Gumbaynggirr leaders present a feather as an encouragement to "fly high"].
- Contributing what he learns to the wider FAMC campaign for the forests) [FAMC member presents a campaigning sign featuring the Lorax, who speaks for the trees].
- Gleniffer Church [church member presents a Bible].
- Bellingen Church [pastor presents water, a symbol of the sacraments].
- Ecological gatherings/Gleniffer Ecofaith Community [community member presents Bunya nuts and invites those present to place them as representation of their hopes for the ministry].
- Other gatherings [Local psychologist presents a quartz heart as a symbol of love amidst the spiritual crisis of our relationship with Earth].
- Quakers [Mid North Coast Quaker presents a certificate with the words "holding your ministry in the light" and emphasises peace building].

Symbols of Jason's ministry

*We removed "and accept the obligation to serve both First and Second peoples" because the acceptance of the covenant requires it. It seemed inappropriate to suggest that someone might not accept this obligation.

Request for support for the deacon
(Jo Smalbil)
This is officially a request to the members of our presbytery, FAMC and the Gleniffer congregation, but everyone present is invited to respond too.

As I ask these questions, will you please respond with “We Will”.
Will you support Jason as he lives out the responsibilities he is accepting today? *We will.*

Will you work alongside him in his chaplaincy – will you care for him, and will you support him with your love and prayers? *We will.*

Deacon’s response
Rev. Dr Jason John shares a brief response, emphasising the vital role of so many people in the ministry, encouraging people to "treat themselves gently" and finishing with a poem that encouraged people to tell their story, in a way that might allay some people's suspicion of a Christian minister.

Induction prayer
(Jo Smalbil) (Jason kneels)
On behalf of the presbytery, I would like to offer this prayer for Jason and invite those who would like to, to pray silently with me.

Loving God,
in every age you have chosen servants
to speak your word and lead your people.
We thank you for Jason
whom you have called to serve you.
Continue to fill him with the Holy Spirit
and nurture his gifts for this ministry.
May he have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus,
and be a faithful disciple,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Mid North Coast Presbytery members pray for Jason

Blessing for the deacon
(Jo Smalbil)
May God bless you and keep you;
May God make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
May she turn her face toward you, and give you peace.

Declaration of induction
(Jo Smalbil)
In the name of Jesus Christ,
and by the authority of the Presbytery of the Mid North Coast
we now declare Jason to be inducted
to serve as a forest chaplain in this region.

(Announce donation bowl for the work of the Koala Chaplaincy project.)

Blessing all people
(Jessi Levy)
Based on a blessing written by Aboriginal Christian leader, Brooke Prentis, descendant of the Waka Waka people:
May our footsteps, on these ancient lands,
remind us of creation and connectedness, in our search for truth.
May the Gum Tree, from its roots to its branches,
remind us to dig deep and reach high, in our action for justice.
May the Eagle, who soars in the sky,
remind us of the power, in our call for love.
May the expanse of the lands and seas, of the sky and stars,
remind us of God's timing in our faith in hope.
May the Creator Spirit, Loving God, Gracious Christ,
remind us of community.
So with grace, mercy, and peace:
go in truth, justice, love and hope.
(See https://www.commongrace.org.au/blessing_brooke_prentis)

Blessing of all people